Sevens
(セブンス)
Volume 17
I Need to get Some Chapter Title Naming Sense, Seventeenth Generation

Wai
(わい)

Story Description:

Lyle Walt is a young noble boy and heir looking forward to the day he can inherit his family's territory. Except around when he was 10 year old, his parents started neglecting him more and more in favour of his little sister, Celes. On his fifteenth birthday, he is challenged to a duel by his sister to see who will inherit the household and horribly loses, being cast out of his family.

Afterwards, he gets treated by the family groundskeepers and receives the family heirloom Gem from him that Lyle's grandfather had entrusted to him. From there, he begins an aimless journey with his childhood friend and former

fiancée, Novem, and the Gem-turned-Jewel that houses the memories, personalities, and Skills of seven of his ancestors.

Original Story can be found here:
Link

Prologue

I was driven out of my house the spring of two years ago.

Winter came to a close, and turned to a season that couldn't help but make one hope for the start of something anew.

I welcomed the arrival of such a season as I looked over the mountain of documents in the office. I placed both my hands on the table, looking at my ink-stained digits as I muttered.

"... Something is wrong. This isn't the sort of revolution preparations I had in mind."

From the Jewel I had placed as a weight to prevent the pages from flying away, I heard the Third's blissful voice.

『You sure are stupid, Lyle. You're the leader here, so it's only natural you're stuck with loads of paperwork. Going out and doing actual work is obviously left to your subordinates.』

It was a sound argument, but I had imagined going out on the site more to give this order and that. But reality had me holed up in my office, surrounded by guards and chased to the ends of the earth by paperwork.

Even if I had a chance to go out, a majority of it was speeches and

meetings, and truly detestable stuff. Inside the room, the one who was charged with looking after me today, Valkyrie Unit Three sounded delighted.

“Master, I’ve finished preparing your tea.”

“How many cups do you plan on preparing today? I’m already full to the brim.”

Unit Three had finally picked it up… or rather than picked up, she had gained the ability to do it, so she repeated the action of roasting tea again and again to appeal to me.

My stomach hurt from tea overload.

It had been a few months since the battle with the Walt House.

The preparations to fight Celes were underway. It would be a battle of continental proportions, but even the country that ruled this land before Bahnseim... in the Sentrass Kingdom's era, battles of this scale were a rare sight, I'm sure.

A large scale battle exceeding that of the one three hundred years ago was to unfold.

In the documents, Monica put together the reports raised by the Valkyries stationed across the land.

As I took the orderly document in hand and read it through, it even included illustrations to make it exceedingly easy to understand. There were graphs as well, so just a glance was enough to understand

the current situation.

“So there’s been a pause in Faunbeux’s efforts to take in its surroundings. It’s quite a surprise that there are still countries trying to watch and wait.”

When such a scale... several million soldiers would be moving on multiple fronts, I was surprised there were still countries who decided to wait it out. There, the Third explained the surrounding situation to me.

『Lyle, this world isn’t one that can be measured by your own reality... you can’t gauge everything based on your common sense alone. In a war of this scale, it isn’t strange for there to be countries where the

scale exceeded their expectations to an extent they can't even make a decision. Perhaps there are disputes raging on within.』

I looked at the report as I asked the Third.

"... Then should I take that into consideration, and deal with them post-war?"

But the Third spoke level-headedly.

『There's no need. If you swoop in later to take all the good stuff, there are countries who won't be satisfied. You've got to direct their dissatisfactions elsewhere.』

Even if I said unifying the continent, it's not like that would succeed just by defeating Celes and Bahnseim.

I'd have to succeed in rule for anything to start. And I'd need to maintain it after that.

"Well, Cartaffs' preparations are ready, and Djanpear's on board, so the problem would be our own eastern front."

Yet the army I commanded took in the Walt House army, so we already had the numbers together. I believe we have a force good enough that I'm not embarrassed to call it the army of the leading power. If there was a problem to speak of, I guess it would be the rattled state of Beim?

Given the time, we'd be able to gather more numbers, but even now, the time for our attack was indeterminate. No, we could attack

at any time, but...

I took a different report in hand.

"... For her to chip away at her own war potential."

... What Celes accomplished in Bahnseim was the construction of a grave for our father. But father was a man of the Walt House, and a Count at that. Yet she gathered workers to build a grave more splendid than any emperor's, and despite the busy season, not only men, she gathered women as well to aid in the construction of this massive tomb.

"What is that girl even doing?"

As I could only feel fed up, the Third appraised her actions from

within the Jewel.

『Just as Agrissa before her, I'm sure she wants to make this continent into a sea of blood. To be honest here, I doubt our common sense will get through. Though it's creepy as it gets.』

I thought the death of our father would instigate some sort of retaliation, but that wasn't the case. We were neatly able to bury the corpse in a modest grave.

But I could conclude that the stolen portion of the remains were Bahnseim's doing.

"It really is creepy. Well, it's been creepy from the start."

As I got back to work, Unit Three

spoke to me.

“Master, the time of your meeting approaches.”

“... Meeting with whom? If it’s about Damien’s demands, send him around to Adele-san.”

She shook her head to the side.

“No, it seems Marianne-san who became guild master of South Beim is coming for a meeting. She wishes to voice an opinion about the management of Magic Stones.”

Hearing Marianne-san’s name, I stood. To place the guild under government rule, I would have to draft up various rules.

So I had made a request for its

framing, and Marianne-san and the other guild-related personnel immediately sent in their complaints.

If they were going to put up a frantic resistance over the robbing of their interests, crushing them was possible. But even accepting the new management, there were many things the Guild couldn't help but be troubled with. Matters related to such contents were brought over to me.

『Because Adele-chan's no good at this sort of thing. Lianne-chan doesn't know enough about adventurers, so it all comes down to you.』

It was just as he said. What's more,

it was a matter I couldn't be negligent with. Anyways, in order to take the Guild's rights, and keep it functional without problem, I'd have to hear them out.

"Hah, let's get to it then."

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... In Bahnseim's royal palace, a portion of Maizel's body was delivered to Celes' room.

Embracing the box that held it, Celes' eyes filled with tears.

"Welcome home, dear father."

Saying that, she opened the wrapping, and gripped the staff-rapier with the Jewel embedded in it. The Yellow Jewel let off light, and the corpse she had prepared in advance began to move.

The box floated in the air, its contents absorbed into the dead body, completing its human form.

“... Celes, I’m home.”

Maizel smiled at her. In the room, her mother in a similar state stood as well.

“Dear, just look at you. And you call yourself the head of the Walt House!?”

As Claire looked angry, Maizel offered his apologies.

“I-I’m sorry. I wanted to get a present for Celes.”

“Goddess, you’re so late father. We’ll have a grand party today.”

Saying she didn’t care about getting a present, Celes happily linked hands with her parents.

Within her Jewel, Agrissa sat in a pompous chair as she looked over the scene. In the inside of the Jewel that was designed almost like a throne room, she crossed her legs as she took on a condescending attitude.

Twirling her golden hair around her fingertips, her violet eyes reflected the outside world.

『... Cute and pitiful Celes. Even if

you revive them, they're nothing more than containers. No, perhaps they're even too incomplete to serve as that.』

Agrissa had perfected a Skill to revive dead, but as she looked at the results, she seemed quite unsatisfied.

『If I had succeeded, I would have revived my own parents. And children. I don't really care about the rest... no, the Walt House, eh? I'd have revived that man who defeated me as well. That was a good one. A truly splendid man.』

Seeing Celes sandwiched between her marionettes as she jumped for joy, Agrissa smiled. But her expression clouded over at once. As

the outside visible from within the Jewel faded away, she stood, and looked at the door behind her seat.

『... When you can't even revive a measly human, what sort of goddess are you supposed to be? Well, even if you could, you aren't even revered as a goddess to the world anymore.』

Agrissa was once an existence born whilst inheriting the memories of Septem. To speak to this generation, there was Novem and Celes. But the memories she carried on were only the broken parts... she only had the memories of each generation's Septem being worked to the bone by mankind.

Her memories as a goddess were

vague, but she had a general idea of what happened. However, being worked to death by those she gave her everything to, at times oppressed generation after generations, those memories strongly remained in Agrissa's mind.

Tracing her lips with her fingertips, she slumped her body back into her seat.

『Now then... even if I keep quiet, the continent will be dyed in blood. How many millions shall perish? I can't wait. I simply can't wait.』

Walking off, she entered her room of memories. In it, the forms of the oppressed Septems watched here.

Not in Agrissa's flashy, exposing attire, the gentle Septems that wore their plain, beaten up rags. Those Septems sent Agrissa some chastising eyes.

In that room of memories, Agrissa laughed to her self.

『Just stand there and watch, predecessors of mine. What you could never accomplish, I'll fulfill your role of protecting all your dear humankind. Of course, not like you who would give anything they desired... but by taking everything away.』

The eyes of the voiceless Septems turned grim. From the chains of the memories they carrieddown, the existences that would give

everything to humans unconditionally.

To they, Agrissa teased.

『Don't be so angry. I'm benefitting mankind much more than any of you. The reason humans kill each other is simply because there are too many of them. So I'll thin them out. It sure is painful. It's painful to kill my dear humans so.』

Breaking into a grand laugh, her voluptuous and beautiful form twisted as she pleasantly sneered.

And she spoke.

『Are you that angry I came to the same conclusion as Novem who once opposed you? I won't blame you... I mean, that one hates

humans. No way you would forgive her.』

The Septems began sending Agrissa eyes of pity. Hit with such glances, Agrissa swung her left hand, and made the Septems fade away.

『How irritating. I've grown tired of teasing and playing around.』

Saying that, she looked up.

『Now Celes... the time of our promise is soon to approach. Until then, enjoy it all you want.』

Agrissa's laugh reverberated through the room of memories...

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Evening.

The one who entered the room with a frightfully threatening air was Novem.

Enough that I stood from my chair and took a few steps back in surprise. I mean, unlike usual, she was honestly angry. Not like the anger directed at a mischievous child, honest to goodness angry.

Did I do something?

“W-what’s wrong Novem?”

As I timidly said that, Novem got her breathing in order as she corrected her posture before my eyes.

“Pardon my intrusion. But there was something I had to confirm, so I’m in a bit of a hurry. So, Lyle-sama…”

Before her uncharacteristic intimidation, I felt as if my voice would turn inside out. From the Jewel hung at my neck, the Third panicked.

『What did you do, Lyle? I’ve never seen Novem-chan this angry at you before.』

Neither have I. While I had a few inklings as to why she could be angry, I got the feeling none of them were enough for her to be this angry.

“W-what could it be!?”

“… I heard from Baldoir-dono. Is it

true that you desire peace, and are setting it as your final objective?"

Hearing that, I tilted my head.

"That? No, I definitely did say it. But it's not like I'm thinking of immediate peace or anything, and my thoughts over what exactly to do to attain peace aren't fully in order yet. I just thought it would be nice if we could actualize it in a few hundred or thousand years is all."

I understand it's difficult, but I don't think it's mistaken to try and take the first step. They were words I said in my high tensions, but I don't have to mind to deny them.

Novem seemed terribly depressed.

"... They weren't the drunken words

of your post-Growth state?”

When Baldoir talked to me, I was in the state the Third calls ‘mr. lyle’. But his opinion wasn’t particularily different from mine or anything.

“No, what of it?”

Novem spoke in regards to me. More serious than I had ever seen her before.

“Lyle-sama, peace is always naught but an illusion. What’s more, it’s a troubling one that poisons those that partake in it. It is only in a world where they cannot live without fighting that humans become strong. Once they stop fighting, mankind will degrade in kind.”

“What’s with you today? This isn’t like you.”

As I said that with a laugh, Novem drew closer. And she grasped both my shoulders. Her fingers dug in, and I could feel some pain.

Her eyes opened with, and it felt as if the light had faded from them.

“Not like me? No, I am serious. The one who isn’t like himself is you, Lyle-sama. When you’ve fought all the way to where you are, what did you feel? What happened to you when you decided to stand against Celes-sama? Lyle-sama, have you ever thought over what would happen if you actually achieved peace? If you do, what awaits is...”

There, Miranda entered the room. She had Valkyries with her, and she headed for Novem as she drew closer to me.

“Novem, what are you doing?”

In that dimly lit room, with the light of the window to her back, it looked as if Miranda’s eyes were glowing in the shadows. This was a different sort of scary.

Novem slowly turned around, as she looked at her fingers digging into my shoulders.

“M-my deepest apologies, Lyle-sama! I’ll heal it up at once. But I’m...”

She seemed on the verge of tears, but she was trying to tell me

something. Miranda entered, and pulled Novem away.

“I’ll do the healing. Novem, get out of here. We’ll hear you out once you cool your head.”

Surrounded by Valkyries, Novem left the room. Hanging her head, the words she muttered...

“... What waits in a world of peace is a gentle demise.”

She said.

Chapter 303: Various Forms of Peace

“Novem was really angry.”

『Honestly, her anger made me want to cry ‘eek!’ Or rather, that attitude from Novem-chan... Hmm, looks like the previous Novems have been through quite a bit, or perhaps it’s because of some ancient memory? Well, nothing we can understand here and now.』

The relation to goddesses and evil gods was still vague, and it was difficult to say I understood it. But it’s fact that Septem and Celes

seemed fearful of Novem.

And Novem seemed distraught when I said I'd aim for peace.

"... So there are people who hate peace. But I never thought Novem would hate it to such an extent."

I lay on my room's bed, looking up at the ceiling. The top of that canopy-laden bed was fitted with complicated craftsmanship, and I traced its lines with my eyes.

『Weapons dealers detest peace, for starters. You need some moderate strife for people to buy their goods. But Novem-chan's no merchant. And a gentle demise, that phrasing of hers was a bothersome one』

Novem said that only a gentle

demise awaited at the end of peace.

“A gentle demise, is it? Is that really so bad? Rather than death in war, or death of being dragged into conflict, it sounds much more wholesome.”

『I have to agree with that one. I mean, I wanted to age normally, drawing my last breath on a peaceful bed after all. Why did I have to give a sorrowful parting in battle?』

As I carried out a serious conversation with the Third, I heard some noisy footsteps. Yet I could only hear one person’s worth of voices.

“W-wait a second. I’m...”

The footsteps stopped in front of the door, so I used Skills to confirm my visitors. It seems three Valkyries were carrying Clara over. The Valkyries posted on guard duty in front of the room opened the door.

“Now, here is your chance. We have bought off the guards for this very moment.”

“Clara-san, we expect great things from you.”

“If you happen to get a chick from this affair, we will look after it for you, so rest assured.”

With those words, the door shut, and I could hear the sound of it locking from outside.

Clara had been deposited on the

floor in her pajamas, a large book clutched in her hands. Her glasses were misaligned, and her hair a mess.

The Third sounded a little excited.

『Hmm, so the time has finally come for Lyle to know women. If it's Clara-chan, then I have absolutely no objections.』

Ladening me with a harem, and seeing how nothing but carnage awaited as of late, the Third had begun to repent. It irritated me, but there was no use in taking it out on Clara.

I left the bed and approached her.

"Are you alright?"

“Yes. I’m fine. Rather, who goes that far? I have to prepare my feelings, yet those automatons didn’t take any of that into account.”

Clara stood and started putting her deep blue hair in order with a hand comb. She corrected her glasses and let out a sigh.

“... Well, do you want a seat? I can prepare some tea.”

When I started using the tools in the room to brew tea, Clara gave her thanks.

“Thank you.”

And as we sat across the low table from one another, Clara opened her book and began to read.

I looked at her.

“Hey... Clara, what do you think peace means to you?”

Clara stopped her hand mid-flip, raised her face and looked at me.

“My peace? A life where no one bothers me when I’m reading, and I’m not troubled with food.”

As she said it clearly, the Third gave an intense approval.

『Right! That’s it! That’s the sort of life I wanted!』

I ignored his voice for now and asked her.

“... Today, Novem went into a fit about peace. Is peace that much of

a bad thing?"

Clara returned her eyes to the page, flipping it as she answered my question.

"When I gain new knowledge from a book, I'm filled with an extremely happy feeling. But I know there are people who don't feel the same way. Like Aria-san who hates reading. And Shannon-chan who can't read books even if she wanted to. To conclude, my own peace will be a boring hell to the two of them. I don't know what sort of peace Novem-san speaks of, so I have no idea what to say."

Even if peace was made of one word, it was quite a difficult thing. If peace pointed to a state without

battle, in the worst case... you'd be maintained under someone's rule, or perhaps it would be a peace akin to slavery.

Clara spoke to me.

"I've heard a merchant's business is practically the same as war. There are people who don't do deals with lives on the line, but... it's true there are many who'd sever life over gold."

What situation would I call peace.

Should I give a finer definition?

The Third read my thoughts.

『Lyle, are you trying to define it more precisely? Then it's best you stopped right there. The world is a

changing one. The more you specify, the less it will cope with the times. In the first place, as Novem said, peace is something close to a phantasm.♩

From the point of view of the House Head who lived through an era of constant war, peace was a dream within a dream, I'm sure.

There, Clara turned her eyes to me.

"... I won't deny your dream or anything. Rather than strife, I'd be satisfied with a daily life filled with mediocrity. While you're at it, why don't you ask other people?"

Tilting my head, I looked at Clara. She averted her eyes.

"Clara, are you hiding something?"

“.. .No, well you see. When they find out I was alone with you like this, the status quo will crumble a bit. To add onto that, the one moderating the peace, Novem-san is currently not functional, so it may become something dreadful.”

From the Jewel, I could hear the clapping of hands. The Third sounded delighted.

『So it’s carnage!』

In contrast to him, I wasn’t smiling at all.

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The next day.

I spotted Vera and Fidel-san who were stopping by Rhuvenns castle, invited them to tea, and asked them about peace.

Fidel-san took an elegant sip of tea as he spoke.

“Hmm. What peace means to me? Let’s see. First, Vera and Gina both have children. A boy and a girl, two to three each. Then the husband dies, and both my daughters and my grandchildren start relying on me. What a splendid future!”

Was that a roundabout way of telling me to drop dead? Vera pushed her heel into Fidel-san’s foot to silence him.

“V-Vera... it’s not like your father told this whelp to die or anything.”

Looking fed-up, Vera shook her head.

“You practically did. Rather, don’t even joke about that. Next time you say it, I definitely won’t let you meet your grandchildren.”

Making a vexed expression, Fidel-san glared at me.

“... All my daughters’ husbands should just disappear.”

He didn’t say die this time, but that didn’t change his intention. The Third laughed as he looked at Fidel-san.

『Nice. Fidel-kun’s just as soothing

as ever. Now then, why not ask about Vera-chan's peace as well?♫

Vera took a sip of tea before looking at me.

"My peace... Where there are no pirates, and all the cargo is safely delivered? Honestly, when someone like you talks about the continent as a whole, I can't really see it. It's a bit different from peace in the economic sense. Use Beim as your archetype for that."

Beim's peace caused me to recall the blood of other lands they established themselves upon. It's true that was something different.

While Fidel usually joked around, he looked at me in seriousness.

“You sure like your daydreams, kid. In this world, there are some who can’t do anything but war. Those who couldn’t do earnest work if they tried... Whelp, you should understand if you were born to a feudal lord house.”

The Third informed me.

『They do exist. Those that don’t fit into the frame prepared by others. It isn’t all good things. There are definitely people who can kill and steal and not understand why that’s a bad thing.』

Vera touched her black hair with her fingertips as her face turned a little red.

“Well, having a husband, and some

kids... and a bit of a noisy old man, I think it would be nice if we could spend some quiet days like that."

Fidel-san looked at Vera.

"... Vera, am I really that noisy?"

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"Peace? ... To be honest, I have enough material that I'll be fine if nothing happens for the next few decades you know."

In the palace courtyard, a stage was prepared. On it the elves practiced their plays and performances, the soldiers occasionally stopping by to

lend an eye.

In such a place, Eva had her pink blond hair tied into a ponytail, her outer garments removed to reveal a highly revealing outfit.

I was used to it, but even so, she was sweaty, so she looked even more lewd than usual.

“No, is it just me or does it feel as if you’re longing for war?”

When I said that, Eva scoffed.

“Hah!? From back when I was travelling with my tribes, we’ve had to ward off plenty of bandit attacks. And if there’s no large stimulus like some huge battle, my profits go down!”

What a pragmatic opinion. To Eva, battle was the seed that grew her meals, I guess. As I found myself troubled, Eva flipped her hair.

“To be honest, there are a few things I’ve come to understand on our travels. Stories of heroes from once upon a time really are popular. The elderly like hearing tales of their own era. But children and the younger generation want to hear about the wars going on now. And someday, you know. I think I’ll find joy in the birth of a new hero too.”

I dropped my shoulders.

“Then is what I’m doing unnecessary?”

“Not really? Isn’t it fine? If travels

become safer, and money gets around better, it'll be a big help. But if there's no stimulus, the people will thirst for stories. Look, the executions of sinners is, in a sense, for entertainment, isn't it? There's a song of old about it. An ancient king said what he needed to give his people was food and entertainment, so every day, he had his warriors fight over who would live and who would die, making a sport of it."

The Third spoke to me.

『Eva does have a point. The people hunger for entertainment.』

As I made an indescribable expression, Eva sent a smile.

"Well, I want to be able to be

honored somewhere without having to travel around someday. I haven't forgotten your promise to build a special stage dedicated to me somewhere."

As she threatened me with a smile, I nodded and gave the affirmative.

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"... Peace? Sorry, can't understand that."

"That's something the smart people like you should think over, boy. Rather, I'm opposed."

Indulging in meat still on the bone,

in a yard of the palace, May and Marina-san roasted the game they caught whole. From their point of view, my words were incomprehensible, it seems.

Marina-san got back to her meal.

And as May heartily pulled out some meat and bit a chunk off, she used her hand to wipe the oil off her mouth.

“Rather, in the wild, every day is generally about fighting. It’s not as if the prey thinks it wants to be eaten. You chase, they run, but if we don’t eat, we’ll be the ones dropping dead. Peace is a word for you humans with your fill of food to eat.”

“I-I see.”

The Third seemed impressed.

『From the wild side, some words without any sugar coating.』

May looked at the meat Marina was eating.

“Hey that’s my meat!”

“Your fault for being slow! And I helped out in the hunt too; give it up!”

The quilin May, and the human Marina-san... they both looked like feral children to me.

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“Peace? Pff, how stupid… that goes without saying. A world where I can eat my fill of flan.”

Shannon laughed at me, but at present she was being forced to kneel on the dining hall floor. The one forcing her to kneel was Miranda.

“Shannon, if you were really repenting, you wouldn’t be able to laugh at Lyle.”

While Miranda ate, she flicked a single empty plate with her fingertip. Shannon hung her head.

“My legs are numb! I don’t want this anymore! I mean, I only ate it because I thought it was left over!

And Monica told me there were going to be some leftovers today! Hmph!"

What's with that hmph? So she didn't learn a thing, and went for the flan again?

"You never learn do you. Well, since I'm here, I guess I'll eat my own flan in front of your eyes to..."

Miranda cut me off.

"Lyle, this girl ate three flan total. There's none left for you or me."

I leaned over Shannon and pinched her cheeks.

"Do. You. Know... what you've done, girly?"

“It hurths! I’m sowry!”

Taking my hands off a teary Shannon, I sent a glance to Miranda. Seeing my eyes, it seems she understood what I wanted to ask.

“Peace, eh? If you’ll let me have my say, irritating as it may be, I agree with Novem. It’s pretty much an illusion. Beim was peaceful, but it was wringing money from its surroundings, making bloody battlefields of them all, right? But Beim was peaceful. If that’s what you’re aiming for, I won’t complain though.”

Miranda finished her meal and reached for a drink. And pushing her chair back, she folded her legs,

looking at me.

“Lyle, did you know? Even a continent has a limited number of people it can support.”

I turned to Miranda.

“That’s, well…”

All territory had a limited population it could hold. It’s not like food was in infinite supply, and at times of famine, it was necessary for the number of people to go down.

“Not everyone can eat their fill like Shannon. Well, if you put your hand into agriculture and things like that, perhaps it will work out. But even so, if things continue to grow, somewhere has to shrink, right? Or

is your peace to starve everyone equally?"

"That's not it!"

Perhaps she already knew that, as she nodded.

"Well, you did say it in a scale of hundreds or thousands of years, so you can leave the specifics to the people of the time. And wait, you don't actually have to hold any responsibility."

She does have a point. She does, but... Miranda looked a little perplexed.

"But Novem's words are bothering me. What lies at the end of peace is a gentle demise... that's a tale of the distant future. What's prompted

her to think that far ahead? Right now, we're even troubled with a falling population, right?"

Perhaps the sacrifices to this conflict already exceeded a million. No, I'm sure they have. The continent warped by Celes, in just two years, she had brought about such casualties.

To an extent where we wouldn't have to worry about supportable population for a while now.

... As I thought over such a thing, Shannon.

"I've completely lost all feeling in my legs. Please forgive me already."

She cried as she begged forgiveness.

Chapter 304: There is a Rabbit on the Moon

“Peace? Even if you ask me that all of a sudden, there’s no way I would know. And wait, what about you?”

In Rhuvenns’ Castle courtyard, Aria was carrying out her daily training. Swinging her spear, and shedding her sweat, she used to look nothing but rough.

But now, I could feel a bit of sensuality from it. Close to two years since we met, does this mean Aria had grown as well?

“My peace?”

When I asked Aria about peace, she sent the question right back. I folded my arms. Looking down a bit, I drew out an honest answer from my heart.

“If there’s no carnage going on among the girls, I guess it’s peaceful.”

From the Jewel, the Third raised a large laugh.

『Ahahaha, it really is a matter of life and death!』

And whose fault do you think that is? Well, I do hold responsibility myself, so I can’t blame everything on the ancestors.

Aria drew back a bit from me, staring as she wiped her sweat with a towel draping that towel over her shoulders, she stuck her spear into the ground.

"... Shouldn't you think about that sort of thing once everything's over with?"

"Even if you say everything's over... see, even if we do beat Celes, the problems are what comes after. There's no doubt it will get extremely busy."

I wanted to think over what I could at the present stage.

Aria looked at me.

"Well, even if you tell me peace, I can't even imagine it. Back when I

was in Bahnseim, there was a skirmish going on somewhere every year. Some war of a few thousand at the border, and the children were always talking about the knights who performed in them."

From our everyday lives, it was only natural that there was some fighting going on somewhere. Aria's expression showed that the word peace didn't really hit it home for her.

"I think I'll start thinking about it after we beat Celes. If we don't win, then whatever thought I gave to it would have been pointless, see?"

That's not mistaken. I thought, as I shrugged my shoulders. And Aria spoke to me.

“And so? Did you make up with Novem? It would be troublesome if you got into a fight.”

“We weren’t particularly fighting or anything.”

She said it would be troublesome if my relation with Novem worsened, tapering her mouth a bit.

“Now look here. The reason Novem was able to keep the balance was because she was the closest one to you. If something happens, Novem’s that thing, you know… I-influence? That sort of thing will grow weaker. Don’t blame me if you get loads of wives pushed onto you now.”

That would be troubling. I thought

as I decided to talk with Novem.

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Novem's room.

The Valkyries stood on guard as Novem was in a temporary state of house arrest. Originally, there was plenty of work I wanted her to do, but I had her take a break and stay in her room.

When I came to the room, she began preparing tea.

"I can't prepare any snacks here. Should I put in an order?"

The room Novem used was kept clean, but there was barely anything she had brought with her in it.

Thinking back, Novem only ever bought the absolute necessities. I'd given her various accessories as presents, but such things were preciously tucked away.

"No, tea is more than enough. So... about what happened."

It looked as if her tea-brewing hands had frozen. The Third in the Jewel showed a reaction as well.

『It's rare to see Novem flustered or rather... she was that mindful of it?』

After she prepared the tea in a space of silence, she sat on the sofa

and spoke after taking a sip of the cup she'd prepared for herself.

"... Are the heads of history listening as well?"

The Third did not answer the glance directed at the Jewel.

"Only the Third's remains. The others... entrusted various things to me and fulfilled their roles."

There, Novem gave just a hint of a smile.

"So they fulfilled their roles? That's good. But it's a bit unfortunate. I wanted to meet them someday."

Within the Jewel, the Third quietly.

『I'd rather not meet. She's quite

the mystery, this one.』

In regards to Novem, I shifted the conversation from the Jewel and asked what I wanted to.

“That aside, Novem. Is it a bad thing for me to aim for peace?”

Novem’s gaze dropped to the cup in her hands, and quietly, quietly she began to speak.

“Lyle-sama what is peace?”

“It’s a vague thing I don’t really understand. I tried asking myself and the people around me, and the answer I got was that it’s tranquility for one’s self and those around them. Perhaps humans can only direct their focus on their immediate surroundings.”

If one's self and everyone around were peaceful, I'm sure the rest was someone else's business. But just how many people weren't included in that?

"Pease is an illusion. Let's see. It's something like a cloud. You look at it as if it were there, and yet you'll never be able to grasp it. Its shape changes as it flows with the wind. It barely has a set shape to begin with."

I addressed Novem.

"And that's why I shouldn't aim for it?"

Novem raised her face. She made a serious expression.

"... If anyone else said it, perhaps it

would be a daydream. But when it comes out of your mouth, Lyle-sama, it will surely have a large influence on the future. Your words may be misconstrued, and the humans to come may use them to cause the fall of your own name."

I'm not that amazing. Well, I am trying for emperor, and if I did get my hands on that seat, I'm sure my name would be left in the books of history.

But to that extent?

"Even if pointless battles don't carry on forever, there are plenty of monsters and bandits. At the very least, I think it's fine if we aim for world that's a bit more peaceful. And no one can say how things are

going to be a century, even a millennium from now."

When I said that much, Novem looked at me and gave a powerless laugh.

"Let's say you unify the continent and set up a stable rule. The continent will experience major development, and in a few thousand years... no, given a hundred years, man will even be able to set foot on the moon. If Professor Damien and automaton Monica-san got serious, I'm sure they'd be able to reach the moon in a few decades. In such a world... Lyle-sama, do you think monsters and bandits will really be a threat?"

From the Jewel, in a serious voice.

『The moon, huh... I'd like to call myself a romantic. I do hope we find a rabbit up there. If the Fifth was around, I'm sure he would've danced for joy. You think the rabbit on the moon will be able to talk?』

... I'd like him to keep quiet.

"The moon. Well, if Damien got serious, I'm sure he'd be able to do a lot of things. But the man himself is a pervert as you can see, so I don't think he has interest in that sort of thing."

Novem looked at me sorrowfully.

"No, I'm sure Professor Damien's wishes will be granted if he goes to the moon. To be more precise, I think he'll make massive progress.

Because up there... there are still some ancient facilities in good-enough conditions."

"Facilities? Don't you mean ruins?"

I opened my mouth in surprise, but that wasn't what I wanted to ask.

... Why did Novem know of such a thing? ...

An evil god's memory? As I thought that, Novem took another sip of tea, and took her eyes off of me.

"I'm sure you've already heard much in the Jewel. How much have you come to know?"

I gave an honest answer.

"That you're an evil god... that you

carry on the memories of the evil god Novem, and that Celes carries the negative memory of the goddess Septem. And the reason that your clan has stayed in my House's shadows, continuing to support us."

Novem smiled.

"If you know that much, that makes matters quick. That's right. Lyle-sama, you have the right to get this continent in your hands. Everything once robbed by Bahnseim, the time has come for the Walt House to retake its rightful place."

As I sipped the tea, the Third sounded uninterested.

「... But you know, there's no helping it if someone got the jump

on our ancestor, right? Even if you say we have a right or something like that, I'm sure Bahnseim would be angry. Rather, if their positions were reversed, what tune would you be singing? Is how it would be. Though I'll lend my knowledge towards Lyle's victory either way. Prosperity and decay come in a set, after all.♩

"I can't see your point. In the end, is that related to peace?"

Novem turned expressionless.

"It does. Mankind who once leapt from the earth and spread their sphere of existence to the moon... faced a gentle demise within its own peace. They were all wiped out. And by your hands, there is a

possibility that destruction will happen again."

My hand shook in surprise. The tea left in the cup swayed, and I swallowed my breath as I looked at Novem.

"They died out? No, well... it's true ancient civilization fell to ruin, but saying they were all wiped out is a bit much."

If they died out, then who are we supposed to be? There, Novem gave a gloomy smile.

"You can ask if you want. Just how did humanity die out? It's an exceedingly foolish, and uninteresting one, mind you. But that isn't what I'm trying to say.

What peace brought about wasn't only humanity's prosperity, it was the seed if destruction, the ending everyone should have tried to avoid."

As I was about to open my mouth to ask her, the door to the room was knocked upon with extreme force.

"L-Lyle!"

"W-what is it!? You surprised me there! Stop it. Don't give such a violent time at such inopportune timing!"

Novem's dark smile was scary. She was a beauty, but that just made it unnecessarily scarier. And as I resolve myself to ask further, I felt a silent pressure. To be surprised out

of that by a knock, my heart was beating so heard I could almost hear its pulse.

“Novem, you come too! Some new information’s come in to Monica! C-Celes is...”

Hearing Celes’ name, I rose from the sofa.

So she attacked with this timing? I thought.

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We gathered not in the meeting room, but the dining hall we used.

In it, Monica and the Valkyries were scribbling pictures over paper. They painted out the details like trained painters, but rather than a piece of art, the eeriness of the work won out.

On my arrival, Monica's hands stopped. Upon seeing the picture Monica's unit drew, Shannon hid behind my back.

"Eek!"

What was drawn was truly hell.

"What's this supposed to be?"

As I took one of the pages in hand, the faces of everyone gathered grimaced.

"Information from the dispatched

Valkyries. It appears that Maizel Walt's grave was completed. It was a large scale project, and several tens of thousands were rounded up to work on it. Just the people involved number a few hundred thousand, I'm sure."

It was surprising for her to gather hands in such a busy time of years; moving so many people would affect the harvest no matter how you looked at it. I doubt she only gathered people from the city. I really couldn't comprehend what Celes was trying to do.

"Grave? ... Oy, wait a tic. Then what's this picture supposed to be? Why is my father in it?"

Monica's face was stern. It didn't

look like she was joking. Nor would she ever attempt to console me like this.

“By the information, that is undoubtedly Maizel Walt... the chicken dickwad’s father.”

On it was the scene of my father inspecting his own grave. And on a different picture...

“And this is the state of affairs. So as not to make him lonely, all the people taking part in its production buried themselves alive.”

Anyways, it was plain disgusting. How could she do such a thing?

As I held such a question, Novem looked at the picture in my hands.

“... That’s a Skill Septem made. It seems Celes-sama has gotten to master a number of Skills.”

I looked at Novem.

“What sort of Skill? Could it be she revived our father!?”

There’s a Skill that can do such a thing? As I thought that, Novem turned to me and spoke.

“Lyle-sama, goddess and evil god are just whatever people got around to calling us. We do not have that sort of power. It is thinkable that memory records were extracted from a portion of the corpse and reproduced. You could call him a doll for the user of the Skill.”

So he didn’t come back. While I

thought it unfortunate, I also thought it was best that way in my heart.

Miranda took command of the area.

"... We should relay this information to Bahnseim's surrounding countries. This isn't sane. It should become a just cause to knock Bahnseim down."

The Third spoke to me.

『Lyle, Miranda-chan took charge because she thought you would be depressed. Don't forget that. Also... it looks like things are growing too large. The unexpected annihilation of the ancients. And Novem-chan who seemed to know all about it... have a talk with her.』

I shared his sentiment. I turned my eyes to Miranda.

“Sorry. I should have been the one to say it. Monica, get the documents together. And Eva.”

“Y-yes?”

To Eva’s pale face, I spoke.

“... Spread a song. I’m having you sing of the inhumanity of Bahnseim. I’ll prepare money for it. Sorry, but I’ll make use of whatever I can.”

Before Celes’ actions that existed almost as if to purposely give us a just cause, my anxiety only grew.

Chapter 305: Passing it all

The night of the day we learned Celes' crime.

Dropping by the round table within the Jewel, I spoke with the Third who had taken a seat on top of it.

「Now, let's get our information together. Novem-chan is an evil god, and we who've been looked after by such a god... the Walt House carries the blood of Septem. That one's called a goddess, but in essence, it's the same blood of the monster Agrissa. And Novem-chan supports not Celes, but you. What's more, Novem-chan carries Novem's

blood, and even Octō-san's looking out for you. Shucks, you sure have it rough~.』

The Third didn't seem to be attempting to digest the information obtained from the Jewel to a greater degree.

『And this time, we learned there's a facility from the once-destroyed humankind on the moon. Though it's a bit disappointing that there's no rabbit, I guess we'll have to give up on that.』

Do you really have to care about that?

He said he was a romantic, but when it came out of his mouth, it sounded shady.

『Well, it looks like Novem-chan has her own thoughts about peace. The humans of the past? She doesn't want you to make the mistake they once made. So you can't aim for peace... all's well with the world!』

"Oh really!?"

As I stood from my seat in surprise, the Third started laughing frivolously.

『No, I mean, it's not like that's a bad opinion. The ancients of the past failed. So it's important to learn and not make the same mistake. Ah, and I won't particularly say it's bad for you to aim for peace.』

“Then what exactly should I do? If I don’t talk with Novem…”

There, the Third gave a gentle smile as he looked at me.

『When the time comes… just throw it to the times! Pose the task to your children and grandchildren. Don’t worry! I’m sure someone out there will resolve it. No problem, I tells ya.』

I looked at the Third, silently opening and closing my mouth.

And getting my breathing in order, I cried out.

“You’re the worst! Rather, I have to resolve it, don’t I!”

There, the Third tilted his head.

『Oh? And why's that?』

Pressed by the Third, I was a little troubled to answer.

"No, I mean... if I don't resolve it, it will bring trouble to the next generation, I thought."

The Third crossed his arms.

『Lyle... you're an idiot.』

Being called an idiot by the Third, I was a little surprised. Isn't throwing it to the times the worst thing you can do?

But the Third answered as follows.

『I simply followed the plan laid out by the Second, and didn't really involve myself in the territory

beyond that. But it's not like that's how it all was. The Second's time goes without saying. But the situation took a large turn in my time. With war knocking on the door every day, the price of lumber skyrocketed. There's some difficulty to be had in buying food supplies from outside. Contrarily, there were times we could sell our own supplies for a killing.』

According to the Third, the state of the time's didn't quite match up with the Second's plan. And at the time, he had to change his policies.

『While you're in active duty, there won't be a problem. But the next generation needs the next generation's outlook. Your current thoughts may not fit with the era...

no, there'll definitely come a time where they don't fit. At such a time, there's no need for you to mull your head over any and everything. What you need to worry about is preparing a successor you can leave that situation to with some peace of mind.』

The Third's face was serious. And he began talking about the Novem problem.

『To be honest, the peace you're looking for is the same. Perhaps the peace the time calls for will change. It's no good to freeze it solid. And Novem-chan's problem is too much for our hands. To the current you, what's important is getting the continent in your hands. No, defeating Celes. And you'll have to

secure your own safety and take some responsibility. You can become emperor if you want. You can aim for whatever sort of rule you desire. But you see, there are things you're capable of, and things you're not.♩

Even if I got the continent together, I'd declared I'd become emperor, so I'd move towards actualizing that.

At such a time, my free time would be much too low. It would be impossible to move around as I did in my adventurer days.

The Third seemed to predict that my hands would be full with establishing rule and leaving it to the next generation. And I'm sure he was right.

『I can't even imagine it. When the ancients had a civilization far enough to take them to the moon, they still fell to ruin. I'm sure your hands will be full already. So you should give your undivided attention towards doing what you're capable of. It's perfectly fine to leave things to others.』

Hearing that, I felt my mind become a little lighter.

"So I can pass the buck?"

『That's right. Do what you can, and if that doesn't work, let someone else do it. You can't resolve it. And you can't abandon it. Then you've got to pass it on.』

I looked at the Third and nodded.

There, the Third suddenly burst into laughter.

『Well, I threw every little bit of my troubles to Max... the Fourth. Died in battle and all. And thoughts behind the times are just a fuss to the young'uns. I also thought the stubborn Second was too set in his ways.』

"... Why did that have to be the punch line? I thought it was going to become a touching story!"

The Third laughed.

『But it's true. You get stubborn the more you age. No, I get it you know. That's what worked out in the Second's time, and it really was correct. But come to my time, while

it wasn't by much, he had some opinions that wouldn't pass. Goddess, I ignored him and went ahead on my own.』

I recalled the Second's troubles. It's true he had a side of him that was too helpful, and perhaps the Third was troubled by that.

『So once you've passed it on, close your mouth. Though there may be times when you have to say something. At that point it's case by case. And look.』

The Third put a hand to his chin as he looked down a bit.

『To be honest, when I heard the ancients had died out, I thought, 'so what'? I mean, we have Professor

Damien and Monica-chan who'll be able to catch up to them in the next few decades, right? Those two are honest to their desires, and if you tell Monica-chan to restrain herself, she'll happily do so. For Professor Damien, if he makes his ideal woman, I doubt he'll have any interest in passing on his trade. Good for you, with this, you've solved the problem of technological innovation.』

As I wondered if that was fine, the third sounded amused.

「And for humans, even if you keep quiet, they'll go off and kill one another. They do it even if you tell them that's bad, and there's no way peace will be so easy to achieve. First off, you've got to prioritize

defeating Celes. Then rule. It'll be busy. Perhaps things won't end in your era. There's much you'll have to do. So when things get beyond the hand... just pass it to the next generation.』

I wonder what it is... the Third definitely had a point, but some part of me couldn't accept it. When what he said was correct, his phrasing was too blunt.

And the Third gave a light smile.

『But you did have some harvest this time around. Novem-chan was so flustered and she gave you her own opinion. Lyle, why don't you talk with Novem-chan some more?』

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Novem's room.

I had the Valkyries in front of the door stand down, and knocked.

After a while, I heard Novem's response, so I entered.

Novem had dressed into loungewear, sitting in the room. It didn't look like she had been doing anything before I entered. "Novem, I..."

"Lyle-sama, can I tell you a bit of a story?"

Novem opposed my question, and prepared some tea before sitting on the sofa. A low table between us, I looked at Novem on the other side.

“Long ago... this is about the distant past. My opinion diverged from Septem, and I... Novem and Octō, they...”

“Novem, stop.”

“Lyle-sama?”

I decided to tell her what I knew I had to.

“To be honest, with evil gods and goddesses, there are too many stories far beyond my scale that it’s needlessly troubleing. I’m going to defeat Celes and unify the continent. I don’t even know if I’ll

live to see it all come together. Perhaps I'll be entrusting it to the times. So I'll put peace aside for the time being."

From the Jewel, I heard the Third's voice.

『Thet's right. But you didn't tell her you're not still aiming for it!』

Novem looked surprised, but she looked down a bit.

"... Lyle-sama, I am..."

"However."

I cut her off, and asked. It was an important thing.

"I want to hear how you really feel. So tell me. No secrets anymore."

Novem looked at my expression, and resolved herself before opening her mouth.

It was a truth far exceeding my expectations.

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… Baldoir had ventured from Rhuvenns Castle to South Beim.

He had stopped by for work, but even entering the city, his head hurt upon hearing of Lyle's dispute with Novem.

The ones who invited him out for drinking were Maksim and Damien.

Not at a bar, Damien had his three automatons bring drink and food to his room.

As Baldoir held his head, Maksim took a sip of ale.

“Lyle-dono and Novem-dono are fighting? That’s rough.”

He said it as if it were someone else’s business, completely uninterested. At his attitude, Baldoir flew into a rage.

“It isn’t just rough! Do you understand! Just how important of a time we’re in!? Even before the problem of who’s going to manage Lyle’s harem, I can’t even imagine who’ll make the first move! And yet the guns and goods I ordered aren’t

even completed... so I can't go back."

Damien took a bite of the food put out for snacking.

"Old Letarta's a busy one. The other craftsmen can't catch up with their work. Even so, you have it rough, Baldoir. Rather, you sure are courageous, accepting the unsold goods Lyle pushed onto you. If it were me, I'd go insane."

"... For argument's sake, she's my wife, so could you quit treating her like unsold goods? There's a bit of a problem with her personality, but she's a good person."

Both Maksim and Damien felt the same.

“If it were me, I’d go spare the moment a marriage was pushed onto me. You sure did well, Baldoir.”

“And as I was saying, don’t talk as if I drew the short straw. She’s actually relatively cute.”

The two of them looked at Baldoir.

“Not happening. The woman I’m building in my head is the only one for me.”

“Don’t care about anyone besides Adele-sama.”

With those words, the drunkards burst into laughter. Baldoir looked over them.

(Why are the pervert and the famed

celebrity so nice to me? And wait, no matter how you look at it, these are vital members. I need to get a grip.)

Baldoir couldn't seem to accept these two getting along so well with him as he continued his consultation on Lyle.

"What are you talking about, Maksim-dono, Professor Damien. Get a grip on yourselves. Originally, with your positions, a marriage or two would be..."

"But I refuse! I have devoted this life of mine to Adele-sama. While I'm willing to concede to another, there are some things I'll never forgive!"

With a reddened face, Maksim

stood from his seat and refused with resolute bearing. Baldoir covered his face with a hand.

“In that case go marry Adele-dono already. Someone’s already made a request with me to bring up talks of engagement with you.”

There, Maksim suddenly sat down with his face a bright red.

“That… um, I’m fine with that, but the problem is I’m not sure what Adele-sama thinks of me, or how should I put it… and I’m a former retainer, and Milady is an existence much too far beyond my reach. Though there’s a sort of charm to that relationship too, see.”

(This guy’s a pain. Why are there so

many of these sorts around Lyle-sama?)

As Baldoir cursed in his heart, Damien took a sip of the automaton-poured ale.

“Well, does it really matter if Lyle gets into a fight with one of his lovers? With such numbers, I’m sure he has a spare or two.”

On his words, the nearby automaton twisted her body.

“Ah, that dry tone. But that’s what makes master so charming.”

Baldoir looked at the automaton.

(... Monica-dono’s the same, but these automatons definitely have a screw loose. Damn, why can no one

understand the severity of this crisis?)

As Baldoir down his glass, Maksim suddenly recalled something.

“Muh! Come to think of it, I had bet on who would take his body first. The strongest contenders were Ludmilla-dono and Lianne-dono, so I had placed my bet on Novem!”

Damien in kind.

“That’s right! I also bet the loose change I was earning! No... nome? I thought she was a sure things, so I invested all my money on her! It would be troublesome if they got into a fight.”

Baldoir slammed both his hands on the table, standing from his chair.

“What are you guys making bets for!? I won’t crack down on it, but don’t take the initiate to gamble! Right now it’s all becoming trouble with who’s in whose faction! The slightest strange movement you show will cement who’s faction you’re a part of!”

Maksim grasped Baldoir’s shoulders, and set him back down in his chair. After Baldoir reluctantly sat, Maksim spoke up.

“Rest at ease. I’m on whatever side Adele-sama supports.”

“That didn’t put me at ease at all!”

As Baldoir cried out, the automatons brought over refills...

Chapter 306: The Truth

“T-that was heavy. Real heavy stuff there.”

『Whoah~, that went beyond my expectations. Even I was surprised.』

Once more, I found myself cradling my knees on top of my room’s bed, mulling my head over the truth Novem informed me of. To be honest, I had no idea what to say.

“What do you think she meant when she said she left Celes alone because it would turn out for the best? Honestly, I can only hear it as

if she wanted my power and memory of Septem sucked away…”

『No, I’m sure that’s how it is. Her phrasing was considerably sugarcoated, but to be blunt, that shows that Novem-chan was aware of Celes and Agrissa. What’s more, they even carried out a backroom deal so you wouldn’t be killed. Despite that, she gave tacit consent to your memory and power being stolen. No matter how you think about it, this is heavy. Rather, the previous generation was also heavy, but the love of goddesses and evil gods and whatever sure is heavy.』

I yelled at the laughing Third Generation Head.

“I’m serious here!”

But the Third still seemed to be enjoying it. This person, speaking to mentality alone, could it be he's the strongest among the ancestors?

『... Hey, Lyle. The truth Novem-chan spoke of is definitely unforgivable. But upon hearing it, have you come to hate her?』

"I-I don't know. How should I put it, my sense of values is too different from hers."

『That I get.』

There was enough of a gap between me and Novem for the Third to easily accept it. To Novem, my existence was one to safeguard. Not one to love romantically.

But it's fact she loves me from her

heart. According to the Third...

『Not as a lover, but as family. That's truly a mother's love. Well, thinking back on it now, that's how it always felt. She's soft on you, and after accepting mistresses, she didn't seem to have any interest in the legal wife position.』

Of course, I felt as if I was betrayed.

"Could it be, um... the reason LYLE didn't hand me the memories was..."

『I can't deny the possibility you'd become wary of Novem. Well, LYLE-kun was truly a talented one. He casually taught you the base behind Maizel-kun's sword. I'm sure he had other reasons as well,

but he disappeared without saying anything.』

Novem was wary of my past memories. My memories before ten reviving. That was because she had attained me who'd been ridden of Septem's influence.

It was all too heavy, and as I mulled, the Third spoke.

『Lyle, do you like Novem-chan?』

"... Even if she has a link with Celes, it's true that she protected me. So right now, the only thing I can say is 'it's complicated'."

Once upon a time, Celes stole memories and powers from my existence. Learning that, it seems Novem didn't try to prevent it, but

instead made a promise that she wouldn't raise a hand as long as I wasn't killed.

Celes and Agrissa were wary of Novem... it's true that up to now, there were many parts to her that were outside the norm.

"The fact she recommended me a harem was because she never thought of me as a lover, right? That's the saddest part of this."

The Third laughed.

『Come this far, it's laughable that the one closest to you is the one that hasn't fallen. I'm a bit curious about what mr. lyle would have to say about this.』

"... Why have you taken such a

liking to my post-Growth self?"

『Because it's interesting. And there's that gap with your usual. Personally, that 'Then you can fall for me now. Fall for me this instant,' you said to Eva is still the best for me. Fun times, fun times.』

While he did seem to be having fun, I could feel some lonely sentiment welling up. Up to that point, even if I stayed silent, someone would have offered a rebuttal to that opinion. But now there were none. And the Third's tone was also a little lonesome.

Perhaps the Third was thinking over various things as he spoke to me.

『I'm sure there's this and that, but what do you want to do, Lyle? Do you want to throw her out? Or keep her by your side?』

I thought for a while. There, the Third went on.

『It's important to think hard over some things. But in life, there are times when you should keep it simple. The practical problem: If you feel Novem-chan is too heavy a burden... I think it would be fine if you kicked her out.』

On the Third's words, I gave a slight laugh.

"After you've told me so many times to treasure her, you're saying that now?"

The Third shamelessly declared, ‘yep, I’m saying it now’.

『Well, you’re the one I value more, right now. It’s not as if I want you to drive her out. But there’s an order of precedence to most things. From my point of view, I can understand why you might feel betrayed.』

What I felt...

“... Do you think Novem will look at me? Not as a man of some Walt House, but the existence that is me?”

The Third, in a kind voice.

『That depends on you, Lyle. Do your best.』

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... At the port of South Beim, ships of various countries had arrived.

The authorities of Faunbeux were taking part, arriving on a ship of Cartaffs.

There was a reason Ludmilla had personally made her way there as representative of Cartaffs.

Besides Cartaffs, there were ships of Djanpear, Galleria, Rusworth and more anchored around.

“So we’re the last to come.”

As Ludmilla said that on deck, the Valkyrie who came along with her disinterestedly spoke.

“Given the distance, there was no getting around it.”

Ludmilla grinned.

“Now then, you really will be assisting me, I’m sure?”

The Valkyrie nodded and bestowed the information to the queen.

“From our point of view, having you laden yourself with our master’s child holds a great enough merit. You will let us look after it, will you not?”

Ludmilla laughed.

“Do what you want. If that’s what it takes to earn your cooperation, it’s a cheap buy. But when it comes to education, we’ll be using Cartaffs’ curriculum. I want my first born to assertively aim for the next seat on the imperial throne. The runner-up is Cartaffs’ crown… but I’m sure my second born can take over that one.”

Ludmilla looked at the Valkyrie who volunteered assistance as she leaned her own long sword over her shoulder. While she was surprised back when she suddenly offered her cooperation, from the Valkyrie’s specs, she couldn’t help but want to keep her close at hand.

Only when it came to Lyle had they sworn absolute loyalty, but to look

at it the other way, as long as you didn't betray Lyle, there was a high probability they wouldn't act hostile.

But there was a problem.

"So just how many Valkyries will assist me?"

Valkyrie... 【Unit Nineteen】 raised one hand, and kept only her thumb down.

"Including me, four Valkyrie Units will be supporting you."

Looking at the Valkyrie's four raised fingers, Ludmilla touched her chin with her left hand.

"Is that a little? A lot? Which is it?"

“You are not the most popular candidate. The other three units with me are betting on a dark horse. Of course, we are irrelevant to the imperial throne or succession. Meaning... as long as we are able to look after the chick, anyone would have worked. The reason I chose to be by your side is that I thought there would be fewer rivals.”

As Unit Nineteen said it bluntly, Ludmilla’s face stiffened. At that moment, the preparations to head for land were completed, so Ludmilla disembarked the ship.

The Valkyrie came down behind her, carrying along her baggage. At the bottom of the gangplank, a man of tanned skin and pinkish hair

wore slightly-heavy clothing as he waited.

It was Jules of Djanpear.

“Greetings, mighty queen of Cartaffs. I’m the king of Djanpear, Jules Parsewall. I’m glad I got to meet you.”

While Jules greeted her with a smile, Ludmilla’s eyes judged him as a frivolous man as she narrowed them a bit.

“Pleasure to meet you, I am Ludmilla Cartaffs. But even so, when it’s so hot outside, you’re wearing quite the heavy attire.”

Hearing that, Jules gave a bitter smile.

“At this time of year, my motherland is even hotter. It felt as if the Arctic was suddenly upon me. And I don’t think you’re one to talk.”

Jules looked at the uniform black garments covering all of Ludmilla’s body below the neck, without showing any of her flesh.

“I’ve too many wounds from the battlefield that it’s not a pretty sight under these. So it’s my consideration for those around. If that wasn’t the case, I’d have cast it off by now.”

Jules gave off the impression of a carouser.

“Nice. I’d love to see you take it all

off! But I'm no fool. I won't lay a hand on the leader's woman."

As Ludmilla walked off, Jules started in the same direction.

"... So what do you want?"

After a while of silence, Ludmilla was the one to cut in.. Jules spoke with a serious expression.

"Truth is, I have a little sister, see. Born of a different mother, and she hates me quite a bit. But given the chances, I want to send a woman over to the leader. She's a stubborn one, but she'll work if it's for the sake of the country. There isn't a problem with age either."

Waving off his tale, Ludmilla laughed.

“Hmm, and by bringing that talk to me, do you intend to rile me, or perhaps...”

Jules smiled.

“Of course, I want your cooperation. Our countries share no border, and we’re not even connected by the same sea. It seems our leader plans to form a country or station a feudal lord in Beim. Over here, we don’t want our interests to be put in jeopardy. And does that not go for you as well, Queen Ludmilla? But Cartaffs has sent the queen herself to our leader. Djanpear sent its cooperation much later.”

Ludmilla understood what he was trying to say.

“So in exchange for inserting her as a mistress, that sister will enter my faction, you say?”

“That’s right. From our perspective it would be troublesome if that sister’s child actually did end up on the imperial throne. We want her to be placed under someone. With all that’s happened in the family, we have her resentment.”

Djanpear wanted to prepare a mistress for Lyle. But they couldn’t have her take the position of empress. There was no guarantee the sister that hated him wouldn’t try to do anything to him.

“... I’ll bring the talk forward.”

As Ludmilla said that, Jules rejoiced.

“That’s great. With this, it looks like it won’t get too dangerous when I try promoting my sister over the promised drink with our leader. I’m placing my hopes on you, Queen of Cartaffs.”

Ludmilla and Jules shook hands with a smile...

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... A room of South Beim.

“... Che!”

In Lianne’s room, Valkyrie Unit Thirty Four clicked her tongue.

The master of the room, Lianne was surprised by the Valkyrie's sudden outburst. After saying she'd support her, moving various things around, Valkyrie Unit Thirty Four often caused her to cringe.

"... What is it this time?"

'My apologies,' said Unit Thirty Four.

"A ship of Cartaffs arrived at the port. That pink-headed bastard from Djanpear has approached Ludmilla-san, it seems."

Lianne let out a sigh.

"This really is convenient. The freshness of information almost seems impossible."

The reason for this gathering at South Beim was to hold a meeting over the large-scale invasion of Bahnseim. For that sake, instead of the mid-reconstruction North Beim, they had gathered in South Beim.

“The problem is that Djanpear intends to push a woman onto master as well. They will be entering Ludmilla’s faction. With this, will it not put you at a disadvantage?”

“... It doesn’t seem you mean in the factional sense.”

The Valkyrie’s basis was Lyle, with Lyle’s children following in turn. It seems there were Valkyries crying out that if they transferred to Ludmilla’s faction, the probability

they would be able to look after them would double.

“Some of our side have already turned coat. No matter the cost, you must do your best to birth a chick!”

It sounded as if she was joking around, but the Valkyrie was serious. It was precisely that seriousness that made it so ill-natured.

Lianne sounded fed-up.

“No matter how you look at it, thinking of our war potential, it will be impossible for the women going out on the battlefield. In that case, that makes me and Shannon-san the most likely candidates, but... Djanpear’s princess, eh? I don’t

think Lyle is accepting any more, but it will be troublesome if they push for it too strongly."

Unit Thirty Four spoke nonchalantly.

"As always, do something to crush her with your artifice."

Lianne looked at the Valkyrie.

"... Just how have you been looking at me up to now? I'll just say it, I'm not crushing her. What's with that look!?"

Unit Thirty Four shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

"It seems I have misplaced my expectations. If it was you, I thought you would push all the

other women aside, and take your seat as legal wife."

Lianne cried out.

"I'm not going to fight at a time like this! Don't look down on me. And if I'm doing something, it'll be once everything's over. I'm already laying the groundwork for that."

Unit Thirty Four expressionlessly clapped her hands.

"As expected of Lianne-san. With that momentum, take the first born chick with all due haste!"

"... You automatons really are faithful to your desires."

Around the time Lyle was hesitating, the surroundings had

begun to move...

Chapter 307: Circry

... In Miranda's room within South Beim, there had been two beds prepared.

One of them was Shannon's, and once night grew late, Shannon burrowed herself in to sleep. On top of a shortage of hands, in Lyle's mismatched camp, Shannon was a valuable member.

As her demon eyes could read the flow of magic, she was a priceless treasure.

If someone was to show some suspicious movement, Shannon could discover them at once.

While she possessed truly proficient eyes, the girl's personality and lack of physical fitness made it hard to use. The girl with a sister like that, Miranda, was reading a letter.

Relying on the light of the lantern in the room, her expression wasn't the best. More than that she was laying her discomfort bare.

"... I'm surprised he was able to send a letter. In various ways."

The sender was Ralph Circry- Miranda's father. It was surprising he had a route to deliver letters to Lyle, but she couldn't hide her surprise at the contents either.

Written were that one of the Circry

House's personel taking a stay in Cartaffs would be sent over. As they had yet to receive permission, they were still on standby in Cartaffs, but if Miranda gave the okay, they would be sent over at once.

Alongside that, the present state of Centralle was detailed.

Not through Ludmilla of Cartaffs, the letter had been delivered to Miranda through the sailors.

"So it's money, or some underhanded connection. I don't really care, but he sure seems energetic despite all his demotions."

And the most important part was the last bit.

Learning that Lyle was increasing

his individual forces, on top of absorbing in the Walt's main army, Ralph was plotting to get in contact with him. He was seeking out a connection through Miranda.

"Fidel-san's starting to look innocent. No, I guess to each their own."

Ralph was a noble. Fidel a merchant. They were both stubborn.

It's true they wanted Centralle's internal affairs at all costs. In truth, Lyle had determined it was too dangerous to dispatch Rauno, giving up on it.

They were currently making conjecture towards the city's insides

from surrounding situation.

"... In exchange for handing Lyle information, I'll have to prepare a ship for him. I'd like to avoid relying on Ludmilla, but in that case, I'll have to rely on the merchants."

Miranda folded the letter up and smiled.

Under the light of the lantern, her smile was a scary one indeed.

"I'll praise you for your choice to support me to raise the Circry House's status, father. But you see... you're too late."

At present, they were coming one after the next to Rhuvenns castle; the anti-Celes... in order to rebel

against the current rule of Bahnseim, soldiers were gathering under Lyle from all over the lands.

By defeating the Walt House, the tides were completely turning towards Lyle. As long as you ignored the existence called Celes, Lyle was clearly the winning horse.

“If he wanted to make contact, he should have done it a bit sooner. Well, getting in contact with me would have been risking his life, so perhaps he did his best?”

There was a high probability Ralph had put Lyle and Celes on the scales, finally jumping onto Lyle’s train. But to Miranda, even if she received some late support, it wouldn’t make for much of an

advantage.

“I’ll make good use of you. Well, since you did offer your assistance, I’ll at least commend you for the continued existence of our house.”

Looking at Shannon, Miranda felt a little irritation that her sister wasn’t mentioned in the letter at all.

“I should tell him to get out of Centralle.”

She still had some feelings for her family, and decided to tell them to secure their own safety...

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... South Beim.

In the district where the craftsmen gathered, there was a single warehouse.

Around that relatively large storehouse, numerous Porters and parts were stored away.

As the craftsmen entered with tired faces, Monica in a maid uniform unfit the space was waiting for them.

“You’re late. So did you bring the item in question?”

The craftsmen took Monica’s requested goods from their boxes. Cogs and springs; while they didn’t know what she was going to use them for, the items they had made

precisely to her specifications were, in a sense, the crystallization of their sweat and tears.

Monica looked at them.

"... Wonderful. The time has finally come for Porter's completion."

As Monica turned, what stood was their comrade who had come alongside Lyle's party all the way: Porter, undergoing its final modifications.

Final modifications for a final battle, what started out as a simple baggage carrier had already taken the shape of a giant robot. As armor, it used the one obtained from the boss in Arumsaas.

Monica had done this and that to

its interior, and using the parts of the craftsmen from South Beim, she was finally to complete it.

A transforming armored vehicle. While Monica usually didn't show interest in things, it was a comrade she had built alongside Lyle, so she had completed it lovingly to such an extent.

"Wonderbar! With this, the difference in specs between me and those three scraps at Professor Damien's place had become clear enough. I must report its completion to the chicken dickhead!"

To a buoyant Monica, the craftsmen...

“U-um... about our payment...”

Monica hit her hands together. Her gold twin tails gave a slight sway to the rhythm of her hands.

“Oh right, the payment, was it? Then I’ll throw in a bit extra.

The payment was prepared in the leather bag she produced from the space between her skirt and apron. And there, Monica took out some gold coins from her own wallet, and added them in.

Accepting the bag, the craftsmen looked relieved as they confirmed its contents.

“She’s honest when it comes to paying.”
“Right, just the paying part!”

“I don’t think I’ve slept anything more than a nap these days.”

The dwarves and gnomes and human craftsmen were relieved that they’d finally be able to take it east. To them, Monica.

“Whoopsie, I need to put in a request for spare…”

Once she had said that much, the merchants preciously clutched the bag of money as they ran off from the warehouse. But Monica’s selling point was her needlessly high specs.

Beating them to it, she stood at the warehouse’s only entrance with a smile.

“Hold it right there. I’m making a request for replacement parts, and

components for maintenance.”

The craftsmen... upon seeing her smile... fell into despair...

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... Having come to South Beim, and with the Bahnseim countermeasures meeting still a ways away, Gracia walked through the city in casual clothing.

In her motherland of Galleria, her younger brother Leold was carrying out the governmental affairs that had always fallen to her as Grand Duke Proxy. At present, a majority of the authority had been smoothly

transferred over to him, and her position had become a light one.

Her silver hair bundled, she walked the town of South Beim with her female knights who served as her guards as well. But as she'd been released from the heavy responsibility she'd held up to now...

"Ah, when I thought its scale had increased from the last time I stopped by, they even have more shops."

She was delightedly looking at the line of stalls, her guard knights surprised at the change that had come upon her.

"Gracia-sama, you have already

eaten lunch today. It will do you no good to eat from the food stalls."

Freed from Grand Duke Proxy, and knowing the time Leold took his place as the Grand Duke wasn't far away, Gracia was in high spirits.

"Oh isn't it fine? You all have some to. By the way, the meat skewers at that shop are exquisitely–"

There were already visitors at the shop Gracia indicated with her finger.

"Erhart, this one's tasty."
"Hey, don't cling to him like that. Ah, the one he's eating looks good too."
"Hey, Erhart~."

A tank top wearing ashamed-

looking man was sitting on a bench trying to curl up his body. He was surrounded by his female adventurer comrades, but a little ways away, the men were looking over him.

“Who was it? Who ratted out Erhart’s location?”
“It wasn’t me!”
“Just look at him, today was his day off so he was happy he could finally take it easy... just look at how depressed you’ve made him...”

Gracia’s group looked at Erhart. While he did gather surrounding eyes, it wasn’t so much as a rare sight in South Beim, so there were few who actually stopped to watch.

Seeing him like that, Gracia spoke.

“... If a man is surrounded by women, isn’t he supposed to be happy?”

When she asked the surrounding female knights, they were troubled to respond given military protocol. There, having heard Gracia’s voice, Erhart raised his head.

“You over there, do I look like I’m in an enviable position to you? Hey, do I!?”

Seeing Erhart on the verge of tears, Gracia and the knights shook their heads. And Erhart continued on.

“This is all because of that damn Lyle. Pushing all his troubles onto me... goddessdamit. I’m sure that bastard will forgive me if I knock

him around a bit."

Gracia's guards sent sharp stares at Erhart. Gracia held up a hand to restrain them, and the guard unit parted their hands from the hilts of their swords.

"You're acquainted with our leader? I think it best you don't put such remarks to mouth."

Erhart seemed to think it was out of hand as well.

"Ah, sorry for that. I've known him from his adventurer days, so I couldn't help it, you see."

"His adventurer days, huh?"

Gracia called over wanting to know more about Lyle.

“Hmm, there’s much I’d wish to ask. How about it, just a little is enough, won’t you talk some with me? Let’s see, for a reward... I can at least cover the cost of your meal.”

Erhart’s nearby companions all turned to Gracia at once. At that number that lightly exceeded ten, Gracia was surprised.

But Erhart.

“Sorry. Today’s my first day off in a while. It’s been so busy lately that I haven’t been able to take it easy, you see.”

With that gentle decline, Erhart rose from the bench.

“I see. Then pardon my intrusion.”

“Don’t mind it. And it’s nothing too interesting. Back when he was an adventurer, I picked a fight with him and got the tables turned. From there, we got to talk some, and that’s about all there is to it.”

Taking his comrades along, Erhart headed off somewhere. Looking over his group, Gracia thought a bit.

“... I wonder why it is. It looks as if that tank top man’s back is crying.”

Gracia tilted her head...

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... While the main members were

gathering in South Beim.

Shannon took Aria and some Valkyries along as guards to go shopping.

To be more precise, it was a patrol under the guise of shopping.

Infiltration of Skillholders Lyle alone was unable to detect... in order to locate the spies, she had come out like this.

While looking at the goods placed around the stalls, Shannon glanced at a man sitting on the floor. From wherever he had come from, the man looked like a vagrant drawn to the energy of South Beim.

Shannon looked at the man.

“... Aria, that person.”

Aria who was beside her took a sidelong glance at the man. It looked as if he was doing nothing more than sitting and begging, but if Shannon said it, he was surely doing something.

She could sense that he was using some sort of Skill, so Aria informed the Valkyries of it. The information passed to the other Valkyries around, and the one dealing with him would be someone else.

Aria took her eyes off the begging man.

“A begger, huh? Come to think of it, there’ve been more of them around lately.”

As Beim had been trampled down by Bahnseim, these sorts of vagrants were flooding into South Beim one after another.

There were places developing new villages and searching for labor. But it wasn't as if everyone could be saved.

There, Shannon looked at the man.

"Ah, he took it."

As Aria directed her eyes at the man, there was money in the small box before him that wasn't there before. The man collected it with a grin on his face.

Putting it away in his breast pocket, he put the once-more empty box down, and simply sat back how he

was.

“So he was using a Skill to steal. Well, it’s a good thing he’s not a spy, I guess. If he has that much ability, he could do something more earnest... huh?”

Aria looked at the man, trying to remember something.

There, Shannon.

“Come to think of it, we met a man with the same sort of Skill before. He used invisible hands to attack... ah, he was a knight of the Walt House.”

Lyle’s senior apprentice, Alfred Virden. Hearing that, Aria remembered.

“Back when we met Celes in Centralle? You think there’s any relation?”

“Who knows?”

As Aria was troubled to decide, the man stood and headed off somewhere...

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... An alley of South Beim.

The city was a line of freshly built buildings, but it couldn’t help but have places hard for the human eye to reach.

The ones who gathered in such places were those who had lost their places to go, and former soldiers. The soldiers of Beim who fled. Villagers. Soldiers flushed out of Bahnseim that drifted away.

The one getting such men together was a man of the Virden House.

He placed the day's earnings on top of a wooden crate.

Not only copper coins, there were silver and even gold coins among them.

"As expected of our boss!"
"Looks like we'll be fine for a while."

There, the man yelled out.

“You idiots! With this money, we’re going to buy weapons. Listen here, if we get all the people here armed and moving together, there are sure to be folks getting weak at the knees. Then we set up some gambling, and take control of South Beim from behind the scenes.”

The men spoke to their leader, the Virden House man who’d say such things.

“B-but will it really go so well? Gambling’s been banned for the time being, and the soldiers are on patrol…”

“You just have to buy them off with cash. And my House was a retainer to the Walts. Use my name, and given the time, I’ll be able to get

appointed under the leader. Once that happens, it'll get much easier to move around."

There was once a House the Second Generation Head left the gambling to. That was the Virden House. In the confusion of the Third's death in battle, they reclaimed the documents exchanged at the time, and parasitized off the Walt House while holding power over the criminal underworld.

The man knew the ways his House worked, and this time he was going to move in South Beim.

"So you're friends with that bastard leader of this place?"

On his subordinate's words, the

head spoke.

“Never met him. I was only ever my brother’s spare. But that doesn’t change the fact he’s a son of that dimwit Walt House. Let him drink the good stuff while he can. Once he comes out on top, the possibility of leading the entire continent’s underworld isn’t a dr…”

Once he said that much, his subordinates heads when flying.

As the leader was surprised, he suddenly found himself looking up at the man standing atop his wood crate.

With blue hair and blue eyes, the man looking down over him… was Lyle.

“So you were of the Virden House. You sure run your mouth easily.”

“I-it couldn’t be... Lyle-sama? No, this is, well...”

As the man tried to give an excuse, Lyle lowered his katana. When the man’s head bid its body farewell, the remaining subordinates tried to flee the alley and get away. However.

“Yeah, that’s not happening.”

They heard a woman’s voice. In contrast to that comforting and kind tone of voice, the men found themselves wound in thread.

Once she had confirmed she had apprehended all that survived, Miranda went over to Lyle’s side.

“You sure about this?”

Looking down over the Virden House man, Miranda asked Lyle. Lyle wiped the blood from his blade before returning it to its scabbard and walking off.

“Sorry, I have no mercy for them. They’ve brought us pain for many long years.”

Miranda sighed.

“You make it sound as if you were the troubled one. You mean your ancestors, right?”

Lyle continued walking.

“Good grief, they keep increasing our work when we’re so busy.”

Miranda walked up beside him.

“And because of that, you were able to avoid meeting Novem.”

When she giggled at her joke, Lyle stayed silent. The representative of various countries were gathering, and it would be troublesome if any problems broke out. For that sake, Lyle had made a move himself.

But it was clear he had some personal reasons behind it.

“You could have just left them to me. I’d have done the job well enough.”

The one left to these sorts of dealings was usually Miranda. But she knew Lyle didn’t think too highly of it.

Lyle himself wanted to Free Miranda from her current duties. But there was no one to replace her. And Miranda would make use of that sentiment of his.

“... I don’t like leaving everything to you. It’s my problem as well. But there’s no choice but to leave these sorts of things to someone. We need some personnel capable of these shady jobs.”

Miranda looked ay Lyle as he spoke.

“I like it when you have a bad side too. It makes you more trustworthy than any honest man.”

Lyle turned to her with a conflicted expression.

“... It’s because of everything that

happened that I'm like this. I used to be an innocent young boy, you know? But by the time I noticed it, I was a Celes-level villain."

"Ahahaha, isn't that nice? And if you win, you become the hero. That's how it works in the world."

Miranda laughed, and walked along behind him...

Chapter 308: Round Table

...Within the bustle of South Beim, a slight tenseness was beginning to come out.

The representatives having come from across the lands, with their guard duties, the number of wary knights and soldiers had gone up.

In a town of such circumstance, Elza Rusworth was troubled.

“... I’m lost.”

There were too many people walking around. On top of that, she wasn’t usually able to go out, and

even if she did, her guards or someone that fit the part would be with her. While she had been to South Beim before, the rate of its development was so fast it already looked like a different town entirely.

“This road wasn’t here before.”

Elza felt like crying, but held back her tears. While she was fidgeting in a troubled manner, her appearance was that of a tall beauty with light blue hair. Her facial features were well set, but that only served to give an unnecessarily cold impression to her surroundings.

However, right now she was dressed in girly attire... albeit in long pants, her upper garments had frills woven in. Elza had ditched her

guards with light feelings,
wandering the town and ending up
lost, and as she stood nervously...

There.

“What are you doing?”

Holding sweets in both hands,
Shannon stood behind Elza.

“... She took my back.”

And vexed that such a small girl
had gotten the drop on her, Elza
began to sit and sulk.

“How rude. And wait, aren’t you
Elza?”

Elza got up and leaned over
Shannon.

“You’re… Shannon? As I recall, you’re Miranda’s sister.”

They had a dubious relation with one another, and they had few chances to ever talk. They were both candidates for Lyle’s bride, and from Elza’s point of view, Shannon was a rival as well.

From the sweets in her hands, Shannon took one and began to eat it.

“You’re eating sloppily.”

On Elza’s words, Shannon looked fed-up.

“Oh shut it. When I’m in the mansion, my sweets are restricted. So when I get my allowance, I need to go out to relieve some stress.”

Seeing Shannon eat such tasty-looking sweets, Elza's stomach groaned. Frantically suppressing her stomach, her pale skin turned a slight red in embarrassment.

"What? You're hungry? Then there's no helping it. I'll bless you with one of my treats."

Shannon's upturned eyes irritated her. But the sweets she held truly did look delicious.

(No, wait a second, Elza! You're supposed to be the representative of Rusworth. Taking food from such a little girl is...)

What Shannon held out was a sweet that was gaining popularity in South Beim.

“Oh, you don’t want it? This one’s quite popular in these parts, and it always sells out in the mornings, so you won’t be able to buy anymore today.”

By the way, the ones selling them were the Valkyries who hadn’t forgotten the value of money. Each faction, in order to raise funds for their campaigns, had opened stores to spread their sweets and culinary prowess. They were automatons at the base... what’s more, they were constructed to serve humans, so their skills were considerable.

The sweet fragrance tickled the insides of Elza’s nose.

Just as she had started to reach her hand out, Shannon pulled it away.

She grinned.

“Hey now, if you want it, you have to properly tell me.”

“I don’t think I like you.”

When Elza said that, Shannon turned to the side.

“Why do I have to be kind to my sister’s enemy? And I’m being quite nice here. I’m giving you the best one, you know.”

There, Elza stood.

“Are you knowledgeable about these parts? Didn’t you tag along to Rhuvenns?”

Did Lyle leave you behind? Hit with a tone that implied it, Shannon

suddenly burst into a loud voice.

“Hah!? There’s no way I was left behind! Even if I look like this, I’m properly working. That guy’s no good without me around.”

“R-really? I’m not usually around, so I’m not too knowledgeable about the situation.”

Shannon yelled, and Elza fell into a slump. Seeing her like that, Shannon let out a sigh.

“There’s no helping it. Follow me. If you don’t want to take anything from me, I’ll introduce you to a good sweet shop. I happen to be an expert on the subject.”

By the way, the experts on the city’s food as a whole were May and

Marina. They had already eaten almost everything the stalls and stores had to offer, and were quite famous names within South Beim.

“Are you sure? Am I not an enemy?”

When Elza said that, Shannon gave a fearless smile.

“Hmph, I let you be a friend for now.”

She said with her face a little dyed. Elza looked delighted.

“I-I see!”

Rejoicing over the word friend, Elza was once treated as an ornamental queen. For that sake, she wasn’t too good at dealing with people. Her

relationship with Gracia had become dubious, and she was starving for words of friendship.

“I’ll teach you how to have fun in this town. First we’ll fill your stomach. Then we can go to the Trēs House shop for some shopping. If you put out Lyle’s name, they’ll happily give you things free of charge.”

“L-Lyle’s amazing.”

Fidel was just putting the bill under Lyle’s name and forwarding it to him, but Shannon didn’t know that.

So like that the two of them played in South Beim, and by the time they got back, Elza’s guard knights were angry, and Lyle was angry at the

invoice he received.

It's been reported the two of them were last seen kneeling in their rooms in repentance, or not...

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The grand meeting hall prepared in South Beim.

Surrounding the round table were the representatives of various lands. Among them, I sat in an extravagant chair to show my authority, trying to stop my expression from crumbling.

In the meeting room, we were

giving explanations to just how dangerous Bahnseim was. Starting from the Bahnseim royalty's annulment of its engagement to Faunbeux, as well as Celes' numerous abnormal actions.

And once we conveyed the hell happening within Bahnseim, the representatives looked doubtful as they nodded.

To be honest, no one was taking part in this alliance out of some sense of justice. In Bahnseim's east, there were many feudal lords who chose to follow me once they learned of the Walt House's defeat.

And seeing that the times were flowing in my direction, there were other countries and lords who put

forth their cooperation.

On top of that, on top of the trauma carved in by the Sixth and Seventh, Faunbeux's main goal was the reclaim the land they lost.

There, the representative of a country adjacent to Cartaffs that didn't share a border with Bahnseim spoke up.

"This is terrible. It's true there is a need for us to do something about Bahnseim. But leader... for participation, just what sort of collateral can we expect in return?"

There, representing the four-nation alliance, Aura-san spoke.

"Before a threat so great, you'll demand a reward? If we don't take

it down, it's clear that it will threaten the entire continent."

The reason Aura-san advocated for me wasn't... for my sake. It was to show the alliance's, and Zayin's level of authority.

In all actuality, Zayin had provided considerable cooperation in my initial rise. They were demanding a reward for that.

"... That's rich from a small country."

An uncertain air spread through the room. From the Jewel, the Third sounded exhilarated.

『Nice. This mish-mash air is truly splendid. It's a good thing you were able to get a majority of the Walt

House's soldiers on your side.
Serves to keep the others straight.
Contrarily, if you had too few, even the main countries wouldn't attack Bahnseim full force.♩

Aura-san spoke.

"I'll pretend I didn't hear those words. However, if you wish to leave this alliance, wouldn't it be to your best interest to voice that desire?"

It was a statement knowing full well they wouldn't say anything, but that was riling in excess.

Other than that...

"I wonder what to think of one who come's in later with an attitude worrying over nothing but the reward."

“Have you forgotten that without us, you would never be able to put up a decent fight?”
“When you’ve done nothing but wait and see to this point.”

As such dissatisfactions came out one after a next, I quietly listened to what they had to say. From the Jewel, I heard some advice from the Third.

『Lyle, there’s no point in seeking the best possible answer in a place like this. Based on feelings, humans are unable to take it obediently. At a time like this, let them argue all they want, and make a proposal once they’ve worn themselves out. Meetings are a test of endurance.』

It was a meeting to bury over

position and everyone's recognition of one another. It was only natural if an extent of dispute broke out.

And one middle-aged man stood.

Representative of a country even further west than Faunbeux.

"Pardon me. The problem we've just raised is how far the inhumanities of Bahnseim run. And that it is only a matter of time before it spreads across the continent. But while I might not be one to say... it is truly quite questionable whether our leader hailing from the Walt House is truly worthy of being our leader."

That middle-aged man with a well-set beard apparently held the position of crown prince. As I

thought over how sound his question was, the prince went on.

“An alliance of such scale. I’m sure it shall go down in history. Yet its supreme commander, our leader, is related to our enemy of Bahnseim... I’m sure I’m not the only one facing trouble to accept it.”

Within the noisy meeting room, I quietly listened.

There, Gracia-san folded her arms as she glared at the crown prince.

“What are you trying to say?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Cajoling women to spread his influence. I see, that is certainly a way to go about it. Yet how similar

to the one introduced here as the greatest of evils, Celes Walt. Like brother like sister... It is my belief we should use this space to reelect a leader."

The Third laughed. In the clatter of voices, I could hear voices of approval from those who found that most convenient.

『He's sure stabbed at a painful point. Now Lyle, what are you going to do?』

Then on the contrary, who would be able to stop Celes? It was because he knew they didn't have an answer that he sounded so delighted.

I kept my back straight.

"... The soldiers set to invade

Bahnseim are currently estimated at one hundred and fifty thousand. And this is something that will surely increase given the time."

The Bahnseim Lords that made their way to Rhuvenns, and the displeased civilians that drifted ashore. It would keep going up.

The crown prince's eyebrow twitched.

"And what of it? Speaking to troop numbers, the one dispatching the greatest would be Cartaff's..."

Ludmilla spoke.

"Cartaffs can't mobilize and dispatch that many. Or are you to say you can send more? It isn't only troops. Can you secure a means of

immediate communication between all the armies? What of your plan? Do you have a grasp of the situation in foreign lands? If you believe there is any more suited to the task than our leader, then name them here and now."

There, the representative of Faunbeux offered a word.

"It's because you remote countries are like this. Even if you can send any out, I'm sure thirty thousand is your limit. Your homeland is already on a different scale."

The continent had been divided for a long time, and he only had the point of view for small=scale land. If he thought over continental scale, he'd have come out with problems

that couldn't be solved with the number of troops alone.

There, Djanpear's Jules clapped his hands.

"So the results are out. It's good that we've come to understand that. Well, for those that call themselves men, it's a good thing to try and aim for the top. But Djanpear will support our leader."

The major players nodded, and once their support of me was revealed, the other participants were pressured into silence.

The Third sounded intrigued.

「Well, even if you tell them to suddenly think on a continental level, it's impossible. Even I want to

tilt my head down here. You've got plenty of useful Skills and automatons that give you the advantage at times like these.♩

The existences of automatons like Monica was one thing, but the Skills the ancestors left to me really gave me an upper hand. If it was as an individual, Vanguard Skills like the ones in Aria's red gem were most useful.

If it were a unit or on a scale a little larger, I'm sure it would be Rearguard.

But when it came to commanding a large army, Support Skills were exceptionally proficient.

For the blue gem our Founder

bought for its price to become something so great... This world is adrift with mysteries.

I sent a look around the participants and confirmed there were no objections.

“Then let’s continue the meeting. I’m sure you’re all busy.”

But the only thing decided in the meeting to follow was that it was a busy time of year, and most would be unable to move.

According to the Third.

『Well, from spring to fall is generally busy. If they use their working force as their soldiers, they won’t be able to move so easily.』

It seems.

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… Miranda's room.

Miranda froze as she looked at Elza, who'd dropped by on Shannon's invitation. While Elza looked embarrassed, Shannon stuck out her chest with an attitude as if to say, 'how about that'.

"… Eh? You're friends?"

Shannon hit a hand against her chest.

"That's right! Me and Elza are

friends."

Elza spoke a little awkwardly.

"Since I came here, we got to talk a bit, and when we were forced to kneel together, we became friends."

Miranda nodded a few times with her stiff smile.

"I-I see."

(... I always knew she was a problematic one, but this is beyond my expectations. For Shannon to go and do it here...)

As Miranda looked at Elza, Shannon spoke up.

"Anyways, I've introduced you to my sister, so everything's fine. Now

Elza, let's go to the dining hall. Today, the small jellies are for desert, and they roll around your mouth."

"Y-yeah. I want to roll too."

Despite her usual cold image, looking at her like this, she was just as bad as Shannon. Miranda calmly analyzed her... and made a dark smile.

Immediately changing it to a gentle one...

"If you're a friend of Shannon, you're a friend of mine. Let's get along, Elza."

There, Elza spoke delightedly.

"I-I see! Let's get along!"

Unlike her scramble for Lyle with Gracia, Elza looked happy. Originally, Miranda and Shannon would be treated the same as Gracia. But on top of a difference in situation, Elza was thirsting for friendship... making prey of herself, entangling herself in the spider's web.

Miranda pulled her by the hand.

"Then let's go to the dining hall. And after that a bath. Ah, do you want to sleep in the same room? It'll be a pajama party."

"Pajama party! I've heard of that before!"

Elza rejoiced.

(Rusworth... I always thought it was

bad, and it was bad after all. I have to fortify Elza's surroundings some more. It's because her guard's so soft that I was able to slip in like this.)

And like that, Elza was added to Miranda's faction...

Chapter 309: Confession

“Novem... I like you! I love you. I’ve said it before, but I want you to stay by my side.”

How many times have I had to muster my resolve for this confession?

I had confessed to her once before in Damien, but at the time it was splendidly left hazy. I don’t think I made her hate me, but even so the current situation wasn’t one I had anticipated.

The room Novem was confined.

She tilted her head a bit.

“What seems to be the matter, Lyle-sama? I’ll always be by your side. And I love you too.”

If you took it word for word, I’m sure my confession was a success.

But the love she spoke of was...

“Do you mean you love me as an individual? Try taking the Walt House out of the equation. No, please try it. Goddesses and evil gods and your predecessors are irrelevant. I want to hear your answer, Novem.”

On my petition, Novem made a troubled face. And she let out the words that were probably her honest-to-goodness feelings.

“From the moment I was born, I had lots of memories inside of me. Novem... and all the Novems after that passed down their memories, and among them are the memories of the especially prestigious previous generation’s Novem. Perhaps I am a separate existence who merely carried on the memories. But asking what I myself think at this point of time is...”

Meaning... It wasn’t Novem herself, what had come to love me was the memory of Novem.

In the past, I’m sure the story of me saving Novem in her youth was true. In truth, that LYLE would definitely have helped her out.

But to Novem, such a thing was a

trivial matter.

Of all else, Novem had chosen me over LYLE. Desiring a me with my memory stolen and Septem's power gone, she had discarded LYLE who saved her.

"Are you fine with that!? I... don't like it at all."

As I looked down and said it... Novem spoke in regards to me.

"... For the current you, there is no meaning behind clinging to my existence. Right now, there is a need for you to marry in order to leave children behind. But you're already supporting a large number of women. If you aren't pleased with my existence, there is no need

to force yourself to keep me by your side."

I looked at Novem.

"That's not what I mean! That's not at all what..."

To Novem, she couldn't forgive a direct descendent of the Walt House- namely me- disappearing. I'm sure that was because of her preceding Novem's memories.

Meaning rather than I myself, she prioritized the continued existence of the Walt House.

"Lyle-sama, I am aware my existence deviates from your common sense. So... please stop obsessing over me. It's an important time right now. Let's

have a talk once everything is over.”

As it was brought to a halt by Novem, I dropped my shoulders.

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South Beim.

In the room of the mansion prepared there, I absentmindedly stared out the window.

From the Jewel hung at my neck, I could hear a teasing voice.

『Never thought you’d be shot down. She loves you, but rather than as an individual, she’s looking

at a bigger picture. Perhaps she recommended the harem because she didn't want her blood and memories to taint the mix.』

I resisted with all my might.

"I-I haven't been dumped yet..."

『No, you were dumped. This is just a prediction, but once everything is over, Novem-chan will probably accept that her role is finally over, and leave. That's the sort of atmosphere she was giving off, and it's thinkable she'll spend the rest of her life observing the type of peace you're aiming for.』

I fell into depression and sat on the spot. In regards to me, the Third laughed.

『Novem-chan's love is to watch over you, right? She has too many memories in her, that she doesn't have an individual self, or rather, her sense of who she is is hazy. While saying she liked you, the reason she forced the harem was probably so she could leave once you could stand on your own. And yet, because you decided to fight Celes, she decided to watch over you until then.』

I first thought her conduct was strange when she treated Aria as a candidate to be my wife. I assisted in reclaiming Aria's red gem, and then it felt as if talks proceeded on their own without me. No, they surely did.

"Am I hated?"

The Third refuted.

『No, I think your loved. But that love is a bit different from the love known to the world at large. Well, it's closest to a mother's love, perhaps.』

"... What should I have done? I'd rather die than see Novem with another man."

If Novem would pass on her memories and watch over my children... my descendants, she would likely make her own clan as the previous Novem did. Meaning she'd be marrying another man.

The Third laughed.

『Lyle, say it to any of the other kids, and they'll be amazed. In the

first place, you who built up a harem have no rights to say such a things.』

“It’s not like I built a harem because I wanted to! Damn, if this is how it’s going to be, then can we just use your schemes and wicked heart to...”

『... How exactly do you think of me?』

Hearing the Third’s amazed voice, I got my breathing in order, and covered my face with both hands.

“I’m sorry. That was out of hand.”

『No, it’s fine. But I think it will be impossible to manipulate Novem-chan with my Skill. In the first place, the restrictions on my Skill

are harsh. Illusions won't have any effect at all. It wasn't that powerful of a Skill to begin with.』

The Third's Skill was definitely underhanded. It interfered with an enemy's psyche. It manipulated multiple people and had them kill one another. And finally it showed illusions...

But it wasn't too difficult to break through them. For a person with a strong mentality, it could be undone with ease. If you weren't used to using the Skill, manipulating someone with it would be impossible.

"... I understand there's no point in manipulating her to stay by my side. But I just want to hear

Novem's feelings as an individual."

『And if you learn she thinks nothing of you at all, are you ready to give up?』

I wanted to cry. There, The Third gave some fed-up words.

『Lyle, sorry but this is something you have to resolve on your own. It isn't a problem I can lend a hand in.』

If even the Third gave up hope, then what was I supposed to do? At the end, he mumbled.

『Well, I'll at least say I don't think she hates you.』

He said and kept silent.

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… A meeting was held in South Beim.

Having to regulate various forces, the meeting had been going on for a number of days.

Affirming the state of affairs, on top of verifying the plan and tuning it based on different points of view, it all had to be done. The world is in trouble, so just shut up and help out; no one would be satisfied with that.

Yet at the time of ruin, would they think, ‘If only I’d done something at

the time'? Regardless, such days continued on and on.

They held meetings from dawn to dusk, and from then on, their regular duties awaited them.

The one who was known to be close to Lyle, Baldoir, was busily moving around with security.

But the ones to approach him were knights of the Walt House.

The knights had dropped by his room as he was on break. Baldoir was acquainted with them, and one of them was older than him.

Hearing they had something to say, he let them in only to hear a troublesome proposal.

“... Fortify Lyle-sama’s surroundings with your forces? Thinking to the situation, I can only say it will prove difficult.”

Two knights had come to the room. Baldoir knew both of them, one older and one younger than he. They had come to represent two generations of knights.

The elder knights straightened his back.

“I know. I won’t say we’ve forgotten what we’ve done. Even if we said we were manipulated, no one would believe that. But if Lyle-sama is the rightful heir to the Walt House, then we should be placed by his side.”

The knight younger than Baldoir leaned forward a bit.

“I know our standing isn’t one where we can speak out strongly. And that’s why we’re relying on you, Baldoir-dono. Among Lyle-sama’s retainers, you’re the one closest to him.”

Folding his arms, Baldoir looked down as he thought over their opinions.

(It isn’t bad. Lyle-sama’s fighting style is precisely that of the Walt House. If he forms his army around the Walt Army that have drilled that style into their bodies, Lyle-sama will have an elite force at once.)

However, on an emotional level, he was opposed.

The soldiers of Bahnseim were full of ashamed sentiment. And the ones who fought alongside Lyle from his early days were the soldiers of the four-nation alliance and Beim.

The soldiers of Beim hated Bahnseim.

The elder knight.

“We have the resolve to throw down our lives. If we don’t go so far, we’ll never be able to lay at rest. But thinking of the present situation, we have come to the conclusion we won’t be able to leave this duty to another.”

The younger knight pleaded.

“Rather than feelings, you should prioritize efficiency. Time is of the essence. At soonest, we’ll be attacking Bahnseim when the harvest ends in fall.”

Six to seven months. They had to get an army together in that meager timespan.

Getting it together didn’t just mean gathering the numbers. They had to make sure an army of that size could be commanded, and could fight as one.

And the four-nation alliance didn’t have any experience of commanding on that level. Even when trained, there were many

weak links among the soldiers of Beim. The environment of Bahnseim and Beim were too different, and Baldoir was troubled over the naivety he felt from Beim's mindset.

"... I'll bring the proposal forth to Lyle-sama myself. But I have no guarantee whether he'll take it up or not."

The senior knight nodded.

"That's enough. We'll abide by Lyle-sama's verdict."

With those words, Baldoir saw off the two knights, sat in a chair, and looked up at the ceiling...

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Night.

While I walked around the mansion to take my mind off of things, I heard voices.

In the dark hallway, light was leaking out of a slight opened door. What I could hear from inside were Clara and Eva. It seems they were wringing out their voices over something within, and I decided to leave it be.

“It’s not anything rare.”

Clara and Eva generally did not get along. Rather than hate, they often confronted one another. Besides

that, Clara didn't get along with Adele-san either.

From the Jewel, the Third thought.

『Clara-chan's usually real quiet, but she sure picks a lot of fights with those she can't hit it off with.』

She usually thought over the balance of the party, and rarely asserted her own opinion. But when it was about the things she liked or knowledge in general, she often stuck herself out there.

When I peered into the gap of the door, I could see pages of words fluttering around.

Clara and Eva faced one another, throwing the papers they had on

hand.

“Don’t kid with me! Writing nothing but nonsense and turning it to a historical song is the worst!”

There, Eva collected the page that had been thrown.

“And what about you? Writing on and on about things that don’t matter at all! It wasn’t fun or interesting to read at all! With that, you won’t get a single customer!”

“I don’t care about customers! Don’t taint the worth of history!”

From what I’d heard, it seems they had gotten together to compare the records they’d made up to now.

If it was bad enough for them to

fight over it, they shouldn't have met to begin with, and as I thought... with their differences in opinion, they were quarrelling.

Clara sought for historical value.

Eva wanted value as a form of entertainment.

In contrast to Clara's detailed depictions, Eva had cut out all the needless parts, and exaggerated all the lively portions.

"Could it be these girls actually get along?"

『It's a rival relation. Much more charming than the usual carnage, isn't it?』

There, Eva noticed I was watching.

“You came at a good time. Lyle, could you be the judge of it?”

Clara turned, and corrected the positioning of her glasses.

“Very well. We’ll have Lyle-san determine it. Now, come in. Before that... let’s get the documents together.”

Clara and Eva gathered the papers scattered across the floor.

Once I entered, they had me read through their papers.

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“Cut the crap! Why did you write it down in such detail!? What’s more, I only got depressed about Novem a few days ago! How do you know so much!?”

Having read it through, I offered Clara my opinion. She pushed her glasses up with her index finger, letting them catch the light.

“I worked hard.”

“Put that effort somewhere else!”

There, Eva pointed at Clara and laughed.

“What did I tell you? As I thought, I’m the right one here!”

“And what about you!? Why do I suddenly have a hundred wives!? I

don’t have that many! And the number isn’t going up, I tell you!”

Eva averted her eyes.

“I-I mean… that makes the song more surprising. Fifteen just doesn’t have that ring to it.”

“Eh? Fifteen?”

I counted on my fingers.

“Novem, Aria, Miranda, Shannon, Clara, Monica, Eva, May, Gracia, Elza, Vera, Ludmilla, Lianne… that’s thirteen.”

Eva shook her head.

“You have Thelma-san and Aura-san, don’t you? And it’s going to grow again regardless. If it was just

fifteen, then honestly, it wouldn't be strange for the average rich man to have that many mistresses. Like to put this sort of exclamation point on the whole thing, they hear a hundred and Wow!! You know what I'm saying?"

Surprised that those two were included as well, I screamed from the depths of my heard.

"Screw that! I'll never accept such a thing! In the first place, what am I supposed to do with so many!?"

The Third laughed.

『What you're supposed to do with them? You're supposed to do them. And there are already stories of you doing this and that to them

spreading all over the place. Just give it up.♩

I... won't accept it. I covered my face with both hands.

"You've even jumbled up the story with Novem, why do each and every one of you..."

Clara and Eva tried to console me.

Chapter 310: Illustrated Diary

... Shannon kept a picture diary in her room.

While she couldn't see, Shannon was able to see the flow of Mana. To her, letters and pictures fundamentally held no meaning.

However, recently, using ink and coloring tools prepared by Monica, she became able to keep a diary. Miranda said since she wasn't doing anything, her reading, writing and arithmetic skills would fall behind, so she was half-forced into writing it.

So, while she required support from the Valkyries, Shannon kept the diary.

The $\times^{th}$ of ◯.

Today, Lyle was chased around by Fidel-san.
He said something about forgetting Vera-san or something as he gave chase, and Lyle continued to apologize.
Once he was released, Lyle swore vengeance on Erhart for giving away his location.
In truth, the one who gave out his location was me. That was Lyle's misunderstanding.
But because of that, Fidel-san gave me lots of candy.
I felt bad for him, so I gave some candy to Erhart. He tilted his head

at me, but I'd like him to forgive me with that.

On top of the entry, she had drawn a picture of the candy, and one of Lyle being chased around. And one of Erhart as well.

But even if you said Shannon was receiving Valkyrie Support, perhaps she had a sense for art, as her pictures had a certain sense of form. By reading the flow of Mana, she could have a grasp of the shape of things, if nothing else.

But when it came to color, that was a little dubious, so when it came to the details, she had the Valkyries help her. To digress, the helping

Valkyries were of the Circry Sister faction.

“Hah, I’m done~.”

As Shannon stretched, a Valkyrie spoke.

“Your hands are dirty, so wipe them off first. Even so, you have made quite a bit of improvement from the start. With this, perhaps we can make the diary itself something better.”

Shannon put her face on the desk.

“Don’t want to. They used to say three lines was enough, but now they keep increasing the amount, and they’re telling me to draw the pictures properly.”

The Valkyrie dried off the diary page.

“Do you not think it will make Miranda-san happy? Even so, your sense for art was a surprise.”

Shannon flipped her hair. The Valkyrie said, “Ah, you’ve gotten ink on your bangs…” but the individual herself didn’t care.

“As I thought, I’ve got talent. See, I’m a genius. Res ipsa loquitur.”

Looking at Shannon putting on airs, the Valkyrie was filled with charming sentiment.

“That confidence and useless parts really are the best. I pray that Shannon-san’s chick will be a hybrid with master, and carry on

her uselessness."

Shannon did think she was being made fun of, but paid more mind to the last part.

Tilting her head.

"Normally, wouldn't you want the bad parts to be the parts not passed down?"

The Valkyrie gave a grandiose gesture. Her expression couldn't change, so it gave off quite a dubious feeling.

"Of course not! The more useless one is, the more worth there is in serving, is there not!? By the way, Shannon-san, you are the most popular among the Valkyries."

Shannon thought.

(I wonder what it is. That evaluation doesn't make me happy at all.)

As she was thinking it, Miranda returned to the room. The reason she looked so tired owed to consecutive days of meetings in South Beim.

Without any major results, they were a stream of meetings going nowhere. There was no helping she be tired.

"Oh, did you finish your diary? Let me have a look."

Miranda took Shannon's picture diary in hand, and as she read it.

“... Lyle was crying out about appointing Erhart as something he called a Free Knight, but could this be the cause?”

Shannon continued holding out the diary for her sister.

“Free Knight?”

Free Knight... knight she could understand, but she didn’t get the free part. There, Miranda began taking off her overwear. The Valkyrie collected the discarded clothing as Miranda changed into the loungewear she had prepared.

“They’ll hold the class of knight, but they’re knights without a lord, perhaps? See, the Guild is completely under Lyle’s control,

right? So he brought up talks of giving the trustworthy adventurer parties and mercenaries a title like that."

Shannon found it perplexing.

"When he's trying to get revenge, I can't understand why he'd give a reward. Or could it actually be a terrible position?"

Miranda grinned.

"That isn't the case. From an adventurer's point of view, there's no higher proof of trust. You're a knight recognized by the country. It gives you an advantage in taking up government service, and the credibility you have when doing a job is on another level. What's

more, to Beim without nobility, it's technically the highest position. Well, from Lyle's point of view, he's appointed a knight, so he'll work them hard for the sake of the world and its people, apparently. It's not yet determined what sort of reward he'll prepare, but it might actually be quite a pain. If it were me, I'd refuse."

Shannon thought.

(It's Lyle we're talking about here, there's no way it's all good things. Hah, I guess I should properly apologize to Erhart.)

"But I'm the one who gave out Lyle's location, you know?"

As Shannon awkwardly said that,

Miranda waved her hand.

“Ah, don’t worry about that. It seems Erhart actually helped Fidel-san out as well. Remember, how he got those female adventurers pushed onto him last time? He helped Fidel-san to get back at Lyle. And Lyle couldn’t forgive it. As I recall… ‘Since I’m working so hard, you’ll be working hard as well,’ I get the feeling he said something like that. Well, it’s just a little teasing among comrades.”

Shannon thought. Erhart was being Erhart, and it wasn’t that Lyle’s anger was misdirected.

(I didn’t have to give him candy. I think I’ll rewrite this diary entry.)

Vexed as she was, Shannon decided to revise her diary...

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“I’m working hard over here, so you should work hard too. And let me give you my congratulations, Erhart.”

“Bastard, cut the crap already!”

South Beim’s adventurers’ Guild.

Within that narrow Guild, I took up the small medal I had a craftsman prepare and walked over to Erhart. I had intentionally called him out to the Guild.

But when I talked to him, Erhart burst into a rage.

“I can’t comprehend why you’d be angry. I evaluated you highly, and I’m only promising you a considerably favorable reception. The details have yet to be determined, but I prepared for you the status of a knight without a lord. I even prepared a reward.”

The reward in the leather bag was… gold coins. I won’t say it was a lot, but from the other adventurers’ eyes, it was quite a fortune.

“Don’t do anything unnecessary! You’re doing this knowing full well, right!?”

“About what? But with this, you’ll

become Mr. Popular again. Looks like you've fulfilled the objective you declared when we first met. Good grief, how jealous am I."

I wasn't actually jealous in the slightest. I was just happy I got to harass him. Erhart with his head troubled by women problem... of course I did it knowing full well.

The Third in the Jewel sounded like he was enjoying himself.

『When getting revenge, you've got to do what the other party hates; it's how the world works. Lyle, as long as you don't tailor the harassment specifically to the person, it isn't revenge. This is just a wonderful reward!』

I shared the Third's opinion.

I was chased around by Fidel-san, and Erhart who assisted him... this bastard, when he said he wanted a harem, he actually snapped when I went and prepared one for him.

What's more, he tried to get back at me. He repaid his debt with hostility.

"Well, with this, your future is secure. As expected of South Beim's number one adventurer. I've got high hopes of you. Ah, right, right... you can't refuse to accept it, mind you. This is the sort of system that gives props to the guild that puts out a Free Knight. The Guild will rejoice over it."

I fastened the medal to Erhart.

I had a few prototypes prepared, and I selected the most suitable-looking one to bring along. From here on, it would become the proof of a Free Knight.

While they wouldn't have a lord, they could freely cross national borders and protect the powerless. I'd like him to become everyone's aspiration by all means.

The Third spoke with an earnest air.

『Well, it's no good to just put pressure on the adventurers. Like this, it's important to show them that there's hope.』

Erhart looked at the depths of the

Guild counter. Back there, his aspiration, Marianne-san was looking at us.

She happily gave a slight wave of her hand, likely because she recognized Erhart's acceptance of the medal. On top of that, with my debts to the guild, she should feel happy from the point of view of the guild's proprietress.

The Third had proposed making an atmosphere where he couldn't refuse, and looking at Erhart's mortified face, I was happy to see it had succeeded.

... Well, it's a knightly position everyone should admire. What's more, it ensured him a stable future, so the surrounding

adventurers should eat into it.

But perhaps Erhart didn't want himself to stand out any more.

Making sure those around couldn't see my face, I grasped Erhart's shoulders.

It was getting warm outside, and with his tank top, both shoulders were lain bare.

"I have high hopes of you, Free Knight Erhart Baumann-kun."

I smiled... even I knew I was making quite the detestable grin, but I couldn't contain my laughter.

In a small voice.

"How do you like my retaliation?"

Erhart answered with a cramped smile.

“Yeah, I love it. I’ll never forget this. Never, you hear.”

Around were the happily crying voices of women. With his achievements in South Beim, he was popular after all.

From here, he should get even more popular.

The Third laugh.

『It sure feels good to do a good thing.』

I thought so as well.

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A few days later.

From the airspace of South Beim, I watched the ships coming into port.

From quilin-form May's back, I looked over South Beim.

"Lyle, I heard you fought with Novem, did you make up yet?"

May sent over a worried voice, but taking the cold wind to my face, I nodded.

"It's gone over a fight. I don't know what to do anymore."

After thinking a bit, May gave her

head a small shake.

“Humans sure are a pain. For us, we get seed from the strongest male, and that’s the end of it.”

“... Don’t expect that sort of candid, or rather dry relation from humans. If that’s how it all worked, I wouldn’t have to be troubled about a harem.”

That’s right. If everyone was so candid, I wouldn’t have to care about the human relations within the harem.

In the stories, when it came to harems, they were something kinder, or sweet. Yet instead of just bitter, it seemed clear that one wrong step with the harem would

mean blood. No, in the Jewel, they seriously did go at each other's throat.

One wrong step and it was a sea of blood.

"It would be resolved if you just pushed her down."

"... Is it really so bad to want to understand one another?"

After talking to may, I spent a little more time spinning my thoughts in the sky.

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... Shannon's picture diary.

In it, a picture of Lyle with a completely reddened face from his drink with Jules was drawn.

Saying he was going out drinking,
Lyle ignored everyone's attempts to stop him and drank.
As usual, he was down before he finished his first glass.
Jules burst into laughter.
He said he'd bring something weaker next time.
Ludmilla was there too, she gave the collapsed Lyle a lap pillow.
My friend Elza gave a strange face.
But my sister held her back.
It was scary when Ludmilla and Gracia exchanged glares.

Waiting for the diary before her to dry, Shannon read over it.

“Oh right, that happened too.”

She had learned to write more precisely, and her art skills were increasing. While she felt a little embarrassed, even so, it was becoming her precious treasure she added to every day.

Looking out the window... no, turning her face in that direction, she felt the sunlight against her face.

Not warm, the light of the hot sun made her weary.

The season had turned and changed

to summer.

The grand Bahnseim countermeasure meeting had been held.

And once two months had passed, it was already summer. With Lyle's party mainly prioritizing securing food supplies, Rhuvenns and Beim were both hard at work.

Shannon was working in Rhuvenns' castle, spending her days mainly on odd jobs.

"Once summer ends, fall comes with the harvest. And then..."

And then it would be time for the battle.

Bahnseim's strongest Walt House

had fallen. Many of the countries taking part were looking optimistic. But even so, that didn't change the fact Bahnseim held several hundred thousand troops.

Even after erecting Maizel's grave, Celes continued her atrocities throughout Bahnseim.

Spectacles enough to make one want to close their eyes had become Bahnseim's everyday.

From their allies, there were voices rising for them to take action at once.

But it was true they didn't have enough food to mobilize. On top of that, reviving the ruins of Beim was becoming urgent.

Shannon confirmed the diary was dry before closing it. She poked her head out the open window and looked outside.

By the flow of Mana, she was able to tell the surrounding situation.

She looked at Lyle's camp more prepared than before. He had disassembled the Walt Army, and by reassembling them, while there were plenty of problems at the start, they had now gotten together under the banner of taking Bahnseim down.

The preparations were underway...

Chapter 311: Terrible Enough to Cry

In the meeting room of Rhuvenns Castle, I received a report from Lianne.

General Blois and Baldoir, as well as Adele-san from Beim were all here, and I was in the middle of receiving their reports.

“From the start, General Blois has been proceeding the reconstruction of Rhuvenns, so it’s going more steady than planned. It’s certain to be at least twenty percent over our predictions.”

Twenty percent was in relation to food. In order to move a large army, no... in order to move people, food was a necessity. For that sake, we had to hurry with the village rebuilding, reconstruction and development. Rhuvenns already had a development plan, so its progress was favorable.

But for it to be so smooth was also owing to Lianne's abilities. She had a wide field of view, and securing goods and transportation routes could all be left to her.

General Blois seemed impressed as he looked over the report.

"Good job taking it this far. To be blunt, it was so jumbled, I wouldn't have been surprised with a twenty

percent reduction. Well, it's our luck that our leader Lyle-dono is so knowledgeable about cultivating. As expected of a feudal noble, I guess?"

He thought I was lacking in on-site experience, but it seems he had revised his evaluation.

From the Jewel, I heard the Third's voice.

『Well, we've all taught him this and that, but if something goes wrong, I'm here for you man. Despite how I look, I did do some field work and territory development after all.』

The Third was the lord of the time the territory started expanding, and he had knowledge and experience

pertaining to development. I'd occasionally hear his advice and go to the site to apply it.

I looked at General Blois.

"How are things on your side, general?"

"Things are going favorably. I had my own subordinates from the start, and plenty with achievements and battle experience under my wing, so all that was left was to keep training and heighten morale. Well, in order to secure food supplies, a large portion of them have been sent around to agriculture, though."

He had split his forces into three large groups, having them rotate

and train on and off.

But the Beim front was more dubious. All eyes gathered on Adele-san. She looked down a bit.

“Things aren’t so good in Beim. I can only hope we reach eighty percent of our goal.”

Baldoir looked at Adele-san.

“Eighty percent, is it? I’m sure you were allotted quite a share of hands.”

He wasn’t particularily pressing her, but from Adele-san’s point of view, it wasn’t much different.

“We’re exercising caution and offering leadership, but their individualistic mindsets are simply

too strong.”

Prioritizing themselves, their clash of opinions had resulted in this lag, it seems. If they were more cooperative, it would have gone as planned, but even for sending in support, there were disputes over where they would be sent.

Baldoir was mildly fed-up.

“Adele-dono, I didn’t want to say it, but I’d like it if you got a grip/”

From his point of view, it was the top dog Adele’s responsibility. But the circumstances on the Beim front were a little different. When I was about to open my mouth to follow through for her, Lianne spoke up first.

“It’s because Beim’s form of rule was a peculiar one. Up to now, they decided various things by conference, and even if Adele-san gives out orders, I’m sure they couldn’t get out of that habit.”

Baldoir didn’t seem to understand.

“If it’s meetings, we have our own.”

Lianne smiled.

“Theirs were a bit different. As they didn’t have any absolute lord, it’s more that they were using time to fine tune their own claims. It would even be difficult for me, and eighty percent of schedule could have only be done by Adele-san, or so I’m led to believe.”

Lianned looked at me, and I nodded.

Adele-san looked relieved as well.

“Baldoir, Beim is a special region. Within it, Adele-san is doing well.”

Baldoir looked over Adele-san.

“My apologies. It does seem I didn’t understand the rule of Beim.”

Adele-san shook her head to the side.

“It’s a fact that we weren’t able to reach our goal.”

There, Lianne took a report in hand, and perhaps she was calculating in her head as she spoke in regards to food.

“About the supplies we’ve got on hand, our purchasing is reaching its

limits. Everyone's demanding some. If things go by these calculations... as I thought, a long-term battle will be harsh."

Maintaining a large army required just that much amount of food.

And we didn't have the necessary stamina to carry out a long-term battle.

I looked at Lianne.

"To what extent can we fight?"

"If all goes well, we'll somehow manage three months. But that's the limit. To be blunt, if you don't determine the verdict within two months, there will be hard times to come. If it surpasses three months, you'll only have enough food to get

home.”

Adele-san placed a report on the table as she spoke.

“... In Bahnseim, they’re gathering manpower at such a time, and their fields are understaffed. They’ve got a food crisis before their eyes. It’s questionable how much food is left in Centralle.”

There, the Third offered me a serious voice.

『Lyle, be careful in choosing your invasion route. Play it poorly, and you’ll pass through a number of villages plagued by food shortages. And if it comes to that... if you don’t help them, the villagers will speak tales of you abandoning them.

Avoid such villages as much as possible on your march.』

As I gripped the Jewel in my fingertips and was about to roll it, the Third's tone grew stronger.

『This isn't a game. Do you plan to lose to Celes for some stupid reason like donating your food supplies? If you lose then in the decades to come, people will die on the millions scale.』

After some time passed, I gripped the Jewel. And in the meeting space.

"... For our route, rather than the shortest distance, we should choose a route to contain our food consumption. We have to consider

the worst case where there's no food in Centralle to take."

Adele-san tilted her head.

"Eh? Um... if we don't choose the shortest route, our supplies won't hold up."

Once Adele-san had said that much, General Blois nodded with a serious look in his face.

"I see, so we'll be avoiding villages facing famine. We'll have to look into them... how unpleasant."

It seems General Blois understood. Lianne was the same.

"Considering distance and food expenditure, we need to choose the optimum route, is it? It's true, if you

abandon villages pained by starvation, it will directly affect your reputation. It will influence soldier morale as well. When they're fighting in order to save the continent, for them not to even save the people before their eyes."

Baldoir rubbed the inner corners of his eyes.

"... Even if you know the logic behind it, when you see it before your eyes..."

Adele-san tried to say something, but Lianne shut her up with her eyes.

I addressed everyone.

"We'll have Rauno-sa... Rauno investigate. We'll need more

information on our advance route. I doubt anything major will change in the next few months."

Like that, the meeting came to a close.

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... After the meeting.

Adele walked beside Lianne. Diagonally behind Lianne, Valkyrie Unit Thirty Four kept herself scarce.

Adele spoke as she walked.

"For the greatest benefit to Lyle-san's fame, instead of purposely

avoiding the shortest route, we should distribute food as we head for Centralle."

Without changing her walking speed, Lianne cut down that opinion.

"Based on the investigation, perhaps that option will come out. But with absent lords, and changes of hands, the eastern front in chaos from losing a war, no matter how you look at it, a food crisis is upon them."

Where the roads were maintained, there were many towns and villages. Though you could also say the towns and villages were the ones looking after the roads. It was the same for cities.

For that sake, if they were thinking to use the main roads, they would be passing through numerous settlements.

“That’s why we need to save…”

Lianne spoke disinterestedly.

“Saving the weak before our eyes, will we increase the factors that will cause us to lose a battle we must win at all costs? If you still wish to choose the shortest route, then the logical choice is to propose it after you make a situation where that is possible. If you’re just here to speak ideals, then anyone could do that.”

While Lianne had followed through for her in the meeting, right now she wasn’t even trying to hear out

her opinion. Adele spoke.

“We have soldiers from the east as our allies. If we abandon their homes, the root of the problem remains.”

“We never said we wouldn’t save them. We’ll help as long as food supplies permit. But what we need to prioritize is victory. Not to choose our means. Our means for victory are that alone.”

Adele grit her teeth.

“... If it vexes you, then put out a resolution. You’re not in a position that permits incompetence. And if you hate Lyle for it, then that’s illogical.”

“I know.”

With those words, Adele walked ahead of Lianne with swift feet.

Unit Thirty Four watched her off.

“Good grief, you’re like a villain, Lianne-san.”

Lianne let out a sigh.

“I’m not doing it because I want to. If we could save them, I would. It’s because we can’t that we won’t. We cannot mistake our priorities. And without a resolution or alternative, it’s a fool’s drivel.”

Nothing more than an ill-natured joke. Unit Thirty Four asked.

“Then what if there is a resolution?”

“After consideration, we’ll

determine whether to adopt it or not. Of course, we're pushing ourselves with food production. I thought of sending them with extra, but our present situation is one where we're insufficient. Well, I'll put my hopes on Adele-san doing something."

"You won't move yourself?"

Lianne turned to Unit Thirty Four.

"... Do you think I have that sort of time?"

The Valkyrie shook her head, letting her black hair sway.

"You do not. You are already cutting away your sleep for work. I will support you on the site. So while you are at it, quickly produce a

chick and–”

Lianne silently increased her walking speed. Unit Thirty Four didn’t overlook the faint blush on her face…

“Reaction confirmed. Perhaps the day I embrace a chick in these hands is not so far off.”

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… The meeting over, by the time Adele returned to South Beim, she already had bags under her eyes.

After thinking over various things, perhaps it really was as Lianne said,

perhaps she had to give up, or so she dropped her shoulders, and headed to the former Guild East Branch that was quickly becoming the center of Beim.

Today once more, her subordinates were busy at work.

From the Guild's yard, something was letting off a scent. Rather than food, it felt more like some sort of experiment was being conducted.

There, the one who supported her- Maksim- was facing a Valkyrie.

After accepting something from them, Maksim ate it with a reluctant face. There, with a grim expression...

"... Somewhat more decent, but it's

terrible. Too terrible."

The Valkyrie, to his honest opinion.

"I did attempt to process it. It did look tasty, to say the least."

"When my senior knight offered me one as we trained in the mountains it's become something of a trauma. And it doesn't look tasty either."

What she had prepared was a potato. The Valkyrie had found a potato-like tuber that could be found growing anywhere. That potato-like thing was sturdy enough to survive in nature, but the way to cultivate it was different. It was something of a mutation.

But it was terrible. With nothing left to eat, searching for them as a

last-ditch attempt in the mountains had left many with pained memories.

Among them were even some who said they would rather starve than eat them. Of course, if they were really starving, they'd probably eat them regardless.

(You can't eat those unless you're starving. They're all over the place, but they're just a hindrance, so we have to get rid of... can't eat unless you're starving?)

Adele ran out and snatched the tuber from Maksim's hands.

"M-milady! You can't. Something so terrible...! What's more, that's an i-indirect k–"

“Yeah, yeah, just hand it over! Urp!”

Biting down on the tuber, Adele was a little impressed by the indescribable unpleasantness spreading across her mouth.

“... It’s terrible. But edible.”

Seeing Adele shedding tears, Maksim fidgeted.

“I-I’ll prepare something to cleanse your palette at once! Oy, don’t we have anything!?”

As Maksim said that to the nearby Valkyrie, the Valkyrie expressionlessly shook her head.

“So you want me to bring you something? Good grief, after I went through the troubles of preparing it,

nothing but terrible, terrible... are you trying to arouse me?"

Maksim to the Valkyrie.

"Are you sure you guys aren't missing a screw somewhere in the head area? Why not go to Professor Damien for repairs?"

The Valkyrie showed him a teasing pose. Perhaps she was trying to assume a fighting stance.

"How rude! This is normal for us."

"That's even worse! ... wait, Adele-sama!"

Adele cried as she scarfed down the terrible tuber. And she mustered her conviction.

“It’s alright. I managed to eat it, barely. So teach me how to cook it. With this, we can march down the shortest route!”

Maksim couldn’t understand what Adele was trying to say. But the Valkyrie seemed to get it. She grasped the hem of her skirt for a tidy curtsy.

“If it’s to help someone, I’d be delighted. While we’re at it, the food made as I teach you shall be disposed of... eaten by Maksim-san.”

Maksim turned to Adele.

“I-if Milady is making it, then no matter how terrible it is, this Maksim... shall eat it all!”

The Valkyrie shrugged and shook her head.

“There is no need for Adele-san to make it. I shall cook and you shall eat. That is all there is to it.”

Maksim’s face turned pale. But Adele continued crying as she ate. The tuber that would never normally be treated as food had moved her deeply. But it was exceptionally terrible.

“Terrible. It’s terrible.”

From an outsider’s point of view, it was surely quite a peculiar sight.

And like that, when she’d only just returned, Adele hurriedly set out for Rhuvenns castle once more...

Chapter 312: Field Potatoes

Hearing a meeting would be held, the place we were gathered was the dining hall.

A pleasant scent drifted in from the kitchen. As soon as Adele-san had returned to Rhuvenns castle, brimming with confidence, she went right into preparations.

General Blois made a tired face.

“When they said the sudden summons was related to our food supply, there’s no way I couldn’t attend. But I’d like it if she considered our circumstance a little

more, you know."

The reason for his complaints: he had been right about to leave for training. He hurriedly pushed the... left the task to his subordinates to come here, it seems.

Baldoir soothed the general with a stiffened smile.

"But if it can resolve our food problems, that's just how much value it holds. Just what sort of ingredient could she have found?"

I was also curious. Lianne looked a little relieved as she looked at Adele's overflowing resolution.

"You found a resolution, did you?"

There, Adele-san smiled.

“Yes, there will be some problems with it, but I’ve thought of a resolution for those as well. The taste aside, we have determined them to be abundant in nutrients. By the way, they’re tubors, so as long as you do something with the sprouts, there’s no worry of poison.”

It seems Monica had determined they weren’t poisonous, so there was no doubt they were some sort of ingredient. Baldoir touched a hand to his chin as he nodded. He seemed pleased.

“We can turn a blind eye to a problem in flavor. A high nutritional value is something to rejoice over.”

There, the knight by Baldoir’s side...

no, his wife Alette-san nodded with a smile. From how she kept tacking on reasons to stop by Rhuvenns castle, I could see her joy and anxiety written on her face.

She was worried over whether any strange moths would be drawn to Baldoir. To be honest, Baldoir's face was on the better side, and his strength was for real. Even if he kept quiet, he'd attract women, so that was needlessly worrisome.

"At the worst of times, knights have to scavenge the mountains for edibles. It's not like food is always plentiful. Just having some sort of food available puts my mind at ease."

Lianne looked at Alette-san.

“Aren’t you Lorphys’ vice-captain? You have food problems as well?”

Alette-san made a bit of a troubled face.

“Campaigns are one thing, but we’re quite a distance away. Up to this point, we mainly fought in wars nearby, so we are lacking in the relevant knowledge. Well, because of that, we’re troubled to determine whether we’re lacking in food or not, but… this time I’d like to take my h-husband’s opinion.”

She sent some glances towards Baldoir. And Baldoir smiled.

“Then we can discuss the matter in my room afterwards. I got my hands on some good tea, so it works out

fine.”

From the Jewel, the Third looked at Baldoir’s handling.

『If only Lyle could do that much… no, that would be a rain of blood falling.』

As I thought, he’s enjoying my carnage. At that moment from the kitchen, an apron-wearing… cafeteria lady-styled Valkyrie came out. It seems it was a Valkyrie cooking. Well, they’re good at the culinary arts too. I guess I can get my expectations up.

She brought out a saucepan, and some plates to divide it…

“Looks like the preparations are ready. Now have a taste.”

Adele-san looked confident, but as I looked in the saucepan, I thought.

“Potatoes? They don’t look too bad. But I get the feeling we already accounted for potatoes in the plan, didn’t we?”

As I took a plate and stabbed one of the small tubers with my fork, I noticed Baldoir and Alette-san’s faces were growing visibly paler. Lianne spoke.

“That’s right. Are they a different variant? In that case, we may be able to better our food problems some. They smell alright... Obpf...!!”

Putting one in her mouth, Lianne let out a voice a princess should never let out. The Third in the Jewel

was panicking.

『T-those are field potatoes, aren't they!? Who would do such a thing!!?』

Field potato? I tilted my head, and just as I was about to eat one, Baldoir addressed Adele-san.

"W-what is your intent!? Putting out something like that!? Ah, Lyle-sama, don't eat that. These are no good. They're not the food of man."

Collecting the plate from me with a ghastly expression, Baldoir drew closer to Adele-san. She made a serious expression.

"You'll understand if you eat them! They're just plainly terrible!"

“You’ll put out something terrible with such confidence!?”

Baldoir’s atmosphere was different from usual, while Alette-san was shaking her head and letting her hands indicate her refusal.

“Impossible. These are too much. Even if my stomach was so empty I’d eat insects, these field potatoes alone are too much. One of my senior knights made me eat one as a joke... I snapped and beat them down.”

She refused with a pale face. But General Blois ate one of them.

“Muh!? They’re amazing, these field potatoes! They’re just plainly terrible!”

He was in shock. I was curious, so I took one from the Valkyrie and ate it. Lianne concealed her mouth with her handkerchief, her eyes in tears. Was it just my imagination, or was she glaring at Adele-san?

When I put it in my mouth, my body suddenly indicated rejection. What's more, when I bit, this bitter, or rather, sticky, or rather, I didn't even know what to call this terribleness anymore. Perhaps it was as if I was chewing on dirt? My body would not recognize this as food. After I somehow managed to swallow it down, I had no mind to ever try it again.

"Isn't this too terrible?"

There, Adele-san seemed like she

was going to snap.

“But even so, it’s full of nutrition! Even like this, with proper preparations, it’s become as decent as it can be!”

Baldoir yelled. It was the first I’d seen the man like that.

“Don’t screw with me! Definitely not. I-I’m never going to eat one of those again! Never!”

It was the first time I ate anything my body rejected to such an extent. Still with teary eyes, even while choking, Lianne offered her opinion.

“... Let’s put their nutrition and taste aside for the time being. To a human on the verge of starvation,

I'm sure it's a good thing they're edible at all. So will you be able to secure the numbers?"

The eyes she used to look at Adele-san were extremely severe. But instead of Adele-san, General Blois answered with a smile.

"You can get them in masses. If you plant them in a field, they'll sprout in no time, and based on the place, you can find them everywhere in the mountains. If they were actually tasty, the food problems would be resolved at once."

I looked at General Blois. He was chewing normally, and he seemed perplexed as he swallowed it down.

"You seem to be doing fine,

general.”

He laughed.

“Ahahaha... I once got stranded in the mountains from my higher-up’s mistake. There wasn’t anything to eat but these. If I didn’t eat them, I wouldn’t survive, but I would rather die than eat them... it was the worst. Thinking back, I guess I should be thankful they were edible at all.”

But Baldoir and Alette-san seemed reluctant even so.

“Even so, I definitely refuse.”
“It’s too much for me. Definitely impossible!”

But it seems from her position, Lianne wouldn’t decide on taste alone.

“... If you can gather so much, it’s possible. Well, if we can’t settle the matter in three months, will we be forced to eat these field potatoes? Yes, let’s think of these are our meals to come.”

Their complexions worsened.

The Third was impressed.

『She made a ridiculously terrible potato into a plainly terrible potato? Isn’t this a culinary revolution?』

I don’t want this sort of resolution. From a gap in the dining hall door, I noticed Novem was peeking in. And for some reason, she was making a sorrowful face, before she parted from the room with slumped shoulders. I was a little curious

about the apologetic look on her face.

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When our food problems were more or less resolved.

I had business, so I dropped by South Beim. I had to check their armaments as well, but I was there to make sure they had everything they needed.

A majority of the craftsmen of South Beim were busily working for days on end. Because of that, it seemed we would be able to secure our target number of equipment.

Together with Monica, I walked the street when I ran into Vera.

“Oh, so you’re over here today?”

As Vera said that, a large number of goods were delivered to the Trēs House’s South Beim storefront. Barrels were piled ou like a mountain, and using horsedrawn wagons, they were brought in one after the next.

“Did you buy ale or something?”

Vera laughed a bit and shook her head.

Her black hair shook, and Monica made a blatant sullen face, conspicuously letting her own twin tails sway as well. I didn’t really care, so I left her aside and Vera

explained.

“I went a bit far this time. Do you want to have a look?”

She said as she opened up a barrel. It was loaded with wheat.

“This is?”

Vera shrugged her shoulders.

“If you exercise your legs a bit, you’ll find lands with different climates. The taste, or rather the texture changes. It seems it’s a different species. But it’s edible enough, so I bought some to take over. You’ll need it, won’t you?”

I looked at Vera’s face.

“... Eh? You’ll give them to me!?”

Vera folded her arms and nodded.

“Of course. Well, think of it as an investment. You’re a precious customer, so I need you to win no matter what. This is all that I can do, but you’d better come back safely.”

To me, Vera’s smile was too bright for my eyes. Adele-san wasn’t at fault from bringing a terrible potato to resolve the problem. But that didn’t hold a candle to Vera who brought decent food stores.

I grasped Vera’s hand.

“T-thank you. Truly, thank you.”

When my tears began to flow, Vera was contrarily hesitant.

“Eh? Um… Eh? It’s not a significant amount you know. Looking at the whole, it’s barely anything. You don’t have to cry about it.”

I shook my head, and took Vera in my embrace.

“That’s not true! You’re the best, Vera!”

It wasn’t as if this meant I wouldn’t have to eat terrible potatoes. But Vera’s kind heart had touched me.

“H-hey! Everyone’s looking!”

She struggled in my arms… and from the mansion’s window, I could see Fidel-san leaning out with his face a bright red. He had the look of a demon.

Seeing that, the Third laughed. But he was a little different than usual.

『Yep, you sure are loved, Lyle. Then it should be fine. Right, it'll be alright.』

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The night of that day.

Dropping by the Jewel for the first in a while, the Third's words had caught my mind.

Before the round table he sat with the same grinning face as usual.

『What's wrong?』

“No, well... Third, um...”

Seeing my fluster, it seems the Third noticed what I wanted to say as he kept up his smile.

『Oh, you worried about what I said this morning? You’ve grown quite a bit. Back then, you didn’t seem to have any interest in what people said to you.』

He scratched his hair in a troubled manner. It’s true I was terrible at the start. I couldn’t understand the thing called human emotion, and there were times I hurt others.

“Back then I was, you know.”

『But you noticed my feelings, right? Then isn’t it fine if we just say, ‘you’ve grown’? Lyle, it looks

like you'll be fine without me, after all.』

"I'm supported by everyone around me. But I still want you to support me too."

The Third slouched into his chair, and leaned his back into it.

『You don't need my Skill?』

If you wanted me to say if I wanted it or not, to be honest, it was difficult to handle, so I'd prefer his advice.

"It's a fact that I'd much prefer your advice."

『You know how to make a man happy. But that's no good.』

The Third stood from his seat and walked off towards his own door of memories. Turning my way, he directed a smile, so I headed there as well.

When I entered his room, I found the scenery of the mansion the First through Third had spent their lives.

『Supporting you forever is the same as leaving you reliant on my support. It's time for you to go independent, Lyle.』

The scene I could see from the mansion was truly tranquil. In the Third's harsh era, it seemed as if I was looking at another world entirely.

The Walt House's Baronet years.

They possessed a number of villages, the Third wielded his ability as head of the House... and it was an era of long war.

The third had lost his life to it. By his work he was called a righteous general, and carved his name into a history of Bahnseim, but the man himself never wished for such a thing.

Looking at this peaceful scene, perhaps the Third had wanted a more peaceful life. But that proved impossible. Unlike me, he couldn't depend on another's kindness.

"So my time of dependence is over?"

『That's right. Of course, from my

point of view, you don't look like you need my support. Lyle, you've grown quite a bit in these two and a little years.』

"... Compared to my ancestors, it's a bit embarrassing though."

『You think? Even within our history, I think you had your share of troubles, Lyle. You did your best to get all the way here, so have some confidence.』

Thinking over it awkwardly, I felt an extreme loneliness.

I always knew the time to part would come, but when it really came down to it, I couldn't help but hesitate. Yet I understood it was no good to miss the timing. I had

learned that from the Second's and Fifth's times.

"So I really will be on my own."

『Your own? That's wrong. You've got lots of lovers... no, plenty of wives to support you don't you? Even if you genuinely want to be alone, that's not how the world works. It'll only be when you die, perhaps?』

The Third corrected lovers to wives. It's because he said it knowing full well that it was so ill-natured.

"I do get the feeling you've pushed quite a bit of trouble onto me."

『But you're the one who chose it. Well, I had my fun. I was able to see the future after all.』

The Third spoke of his meeting with me.

『At the start, I wondered, ‘will this useless kid really be alright?’ you know.』

“... You sure put it bluntly.”

『Yep. There’s no use lying at times like these. But now I think... it’s a good thing I- we- met you, Lyle.』

Chapter 313: The Best of Lyle

The Third's room of memory.

In it, the land governed by the Walt House was expanding. A tranquil scenery spread out, and within that peace, I walked alongside the Third. That territory on the edge of twilight looked to have a somewhat lonely beauty to it.

The Third looked over the land.

「Now that I've seen a large city like Beim, I do think it' amazing. In truth, I'd liked to have had a go at living in Arumsaas. Killing time in the library everyday would surely be

like living a dream.』

The man who liked reading- and if I had to say, who hadn't the slightest impression of a righteous general- gave a gentle smile as he walked.

『But while we didn't have anything here, I loved this land. Though originally, my brother was supposed to be the one to succeed it.』

Once upon a time, the Second's eldest son Dewey Walt acted to protect the Third and was killed. Because of that, the Third Generation Head Sleigh Walt ended up succeeding.

"Do you regret it?"

There, he nodded with his smile.

『I've regretted a number of times. But you see, then came the time I noticed it. If I kept myself unable to advance from regret, that wasn't what Dewey would have wanted. I planned to die of old age, so I planned to leave all my regret for when I found the time. But there were plenty of folks who did unnecessary things.』

The Third let out a sigh and looked at the sky. There were clouds floating through its deep-orange expanse.

Around, the villagers done with their fieldwork were returning to their houses.

"It's a nice place."

When I said that, the Third sounded delighted.

『Yeah, it's a nice place. Cut open in the First's time and put in order in the Second's... there's little I was able to do for it.』

And he leisurely turned towards me.

『When I died in battle, it was just the worst, you see. There was still a lot I had to teach to Max, and I wanted to see my grandchildren. I wanted to quickly pass rule over to Max and spend a pleasant retirement. Read a book as I watched Max troubled by all the work. Yet everyone went and twisted over my supreme retirement plan.』

It really did seem like the sort of thing he'd think up, and it seems he really was thinking it. The slippery eel of a Third gave a laugh.

『But I got to see how splendid Max grew up to be. I got to see my problem-ridden grandchild the Fifth.』

"Problem-ridden, is it? I can't deny that."

Troubled by various things, the Fifth had cast away himself and resolved for revenge. Because of that, our family construction became a mess. But perhaps if the Third had been alive, the result would have been something else entirely.

“If you had been alive, perhaps the Fifth wouldn’t have had all his troubles.”

But the Third’s opinion differed.

『I wonder about that. Because of the Fifth’s troubles, the Walt House gained the groundwork for a firm system of retainers. And gaining a powerful army, it earned fear from its surroundings. If I was there, I’d slip out of this and that, play it all off, and we wouldn’t have the Walt House we have today.』

Listening in to his words, I tilted my head.

“You think? The Third, the Fourth and the Fifth… with the three of you together, I get the feeling there’s

loads of things you'd be able to do."

The Third laughed.

『That's not true. And if I was there, I'm sure the Fifth would have chosen a different path, so who's to say if he would have grown up so splendid. Well, perhaps his private life would have been happier. When I think of it like that, it feels like I've really done a bad thing... no, it isn't my fault! It's that bastard's fault! Dammit, I should have hit him harder. Hah, now I want to hit him again.』

When he was called a righteous general, he held hostility towards Bahnseim. In essence, perhaps that was just how things go.

I followed as he walked off again, the surroundings gradually growing darker. Looking up at the sky, the twinkle of the stars was coming into sight.

『This world isn't one where everything goes as you want it. If I was with the Fifth, perhaps he wouldn't have thought he would have to become strong on his own. Max was the same. Perhaps he could have been more of a child.』

"You're saying he had to try so hard because you weren't there? That's a bit sad."

『You think? You can also say it's fact. Everyone has to stand on their own feet someday. Well, as a parent, I'd have liked to spoil him,

or rather, there are things on my mind I can't help put to mouth. From a child's point of view, there are times that sort of things is nothing more than a nuisance.』

The Third began talking over his thoughts. It was his relation with the Second.

『The Second was a splendid person. But that's with a standing of governing a single village. While you can call the First a savage, barbarian... etc., having a noble knight like the Second boldly wielding a bow and hunting knife, to be completely honest, it gives some bad rep. But from the custom of the land, they couldn't say such a thing. They didn't have such leisure. But even if they found the time, the

Second emphasized practicality.』

I won't say that's bad. But it had its demerits. In noble society- particularly in a time when one sought connections from surrounding territories- it would have birthed a trend of being made light of.

Yet even so, the Second didn't unhand his bow.

『Saying he chose the bow to protect the First's back and such, if the individual himself was here, I'm sure he'd have a lot to say about it. But the larger the territory grows, the larger the demerits grow. So I didn't follow the Second's orders. The reason I took up the sword was to firmly appeal, 'yes, we're real

nobles,' in my generation.』

I crossed my arms as I tilted my head.

"Is that how it goes? Was that enough to change your relations with the surroundings?"

『Looks are important. If it were just to emphasize practicality then hell, I'd have held a bow too. Well, we had more soldiers and more retainers. The necessity of the commander holding a bow went down, so that's a reason as well.』

I was curious as to why the Third was bringing up this talk with me. It seemed like he was doing something unnecessary, and that wasn't like the Third I knew. Was

there some meaning to it?

As I thought...

『... Humans, you see, they're able to change in accordance with the times. But as you grow older, you become more set in your ways. It becomes difficult. So changing generation is important after all. If you keep your mouth open all the way, the next generation will never grow up.』

The surrounding scene grew darker. But the light of the moon was strong, so it was never too dark. The full moon was a pretty one.

『Lyle, I have a number of theories in regards to the Jewel.』

Looking up at the moon, he began

talking about the Jewel.

“Theories, is it?”

『That’s right. You can just think of them as my wild fantasies. Perhaps Septem-san who made the Jewel never had such intent. But LYLE-kun said it, didn’t he? For you to give him back his body.』

I recalled what LYLE had said. He was a kid I never understood to the end, but he said that the body was his and he wanted it back. I’ve no idea if he was actually capable of that in the first place.

『We know it stores the ancestors’ Skills to memory. In essence, a gem does the same. But is there any meaning to the Jewel going as far as

to recreate our memories to the finest detail? In the worst case, giving us will would be completely unnecessary. Show a few scenes of the Skill in use, explain it, and that would suffice.』

“Come to think of it, you’re right. But in that case, your theory would be…”

『… Memories and will, couldn’t it be to record everything at hand, and steal its wielder’s body away? Could it be a gem is restricting that ability?』

My feet came to a stop, and his as well.

“If that’s true, then the reason the ancestors disappear is…”

『Because what the Jewel wanted back was the original Lyle. And from us, perhaps all it really wanted was for us to pass down our Skills. Albeit, this all goes if and only if the Jewel really has a will. I think it does, but that part's still pretty vague. And at this point, I doubt it really matters.』

I looked down before raising my head. The Third was making a serious expression.

"Then Celes is..."

『Perhaps Agrissa wants Celes' body. No, vessel? That it reacts easier to blood relatives may be because that's most convenient.』

When I first heard a voice from the

Jewel, the ancestors spoke as if they had noticed I was their descendent. I looked at the Third.

“Did you... did any of you ever think to take over my body?”

『Us? No way. What can we accomplish by coming out at this point... no, I do want to read lots of books from the current era. I do want to hole myself up in Arumsaas’ library and spend my days looking for new books to read, but I wouldn’t go that far. I mean, this isn’t our time.』

The laughing Third walked off once more. I hurriedly followed to see him give a kind smile.

『But even so, the goddesses must

be that.』

“That?”

『Calling themselves goddesses, they sure love to spread around trouble. Like with Septem, she clearly gave away too much and ruined the villagers. Agrissa’s the same sort, don’t you think? Shucks~ they really do us in good.』

In regards to the goddesses, the Third seemed to have no trace of reverence. Personally, after learning this and that, I had the urge to tilt my head at them as well.

And the sky gradually began to grow brighter. Fitting for the room of memories, the sun began to rise irrelevant to the passage of time.

The Third spoke.

『Well, let's just pray my bad premonition didn't hit the mark. Lyle, if it looks like Celes is going to be taken over, you have to somehow defeat her before that. It's unthinkable that Celes would let herself be hijacked so easily though. And if it seems you're going to lose no matter what...』

I nodded.

"I know. I'll do my best to make sure it doesn't come to that. Not waging wars I can't win is my principle. I challenged Celes to this fight because I think I can win."

The Third seemed delighted, but as it was, he looked sorrowful as well.

『That's right. The ones who start reckless battles are fools. Hey, being a fool isn't so bad. A majority of heroes are fools, more or less. Like the First's grandfather, that sort of type, perhaps?』

The previous Lyle who won against Agrissa and was killed by Bahnseim... our ancestor. It's true he was that type of person.

The Third shrugged his shoulders and let out a sigh.

『Good grief, doesn't look like a hero will come out like some fairy tale. Our stupid and strong and cool hero to defeat the wicked witch Celes. If only he'd come out, you'd be able to tread a much easier path.』

“You’ve a point. If someone like that existed, I’d give him my position at once. Demote myself to support, and once the war is over, till a field or something in some faroff land... no, should I raise a village while I’m at it? I’m sure things will be in ruins, after all.”

The Third nodded. ‘That sort of life’s a good one. Not much responsibility,’ he said as he nodded to my opinion.

Really... won’t a hero come out? I’m sure they’d do better than me, and there’s no doubt they’d save loads of people.

『Now then, let’s teach you some Skills. For their difficulty level, they’re also hard to use effectively,

and be that as it may, they're Skills you can use for all sorts of evil. I've no words for them. The Second Stage is 【Control】... and the Third is 【Dream】. For the current you, as long as you get the conditions in order, you should be able to use them.』

Looking at the Third's face, I nodded.

And once the Skills were passed on, the sky brightened up at once.

『It's daybreak. I guess I'll pray for this to be your daybreak as well as I disappear... Ah!』

I found myself surprised as the Third suddenly cried out.

"W-what's this all of a sudden? Did

you forget something?”

With a serious face, the Third covered his mouth with his right hand as he broke into a sweat. His eyes were wide open, and looking up at the sky, he covered his face.

『How could this be. I’ve yet to decide a Best Lyle. I’ve got a number of nominees. But as I was the only one on the selections committee... for me to leave behind so much regret... I... I’m... what a hopeless man am I!?』

Looking at his over-emphasized acting, I dropped my shoulders. A blue sky spread out, and the light of the sun was warm. The clouds leisurely drifted by, and around a peaceful scene... with such a

backdrop, this man was the same as ever.

More so, he definitely failed to decide on purpose. I could somewhat understand the reason.

“... You didn’t decide on purpose, right? Now’s not the time, is the sort of feel I’m getting.”

『... So you do understand. As expected of everyone’s hopeful Walt House treasure child. Looks like I’ve got nothing to worry about. Well, with all that’s happened, I think that you, Lyle, are worthy of the Best of Lyle. You are the Lyle among Lyles! Even if I’m split on what to award the Best Lyle Award, that alone is a unanimous decision!』

He said it with such a decisive face, but were there really any Lyles but me? Up to the end, this man really is... as I was thinking that, the Third smiled.

『Those are the words I'm conferring to you. Now try a bit harder to find my intent. Oh whoops, it seems the time really has come. Lyle, do your best with Novem-chan.』

And then it was gone. In the end, I was left staring blankly.

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By the time I noticed it, I was at the

round table.

Atop the table, where once stood chairs, floated seven weapons of silver. The only remaining chair was my own, and behind it stood my door, the only remaining room of memories.

All the other chairs had disappeared, and their doors were gone as well.

When I looked at the ceiling, I could see a large blue sphere glowing, and around it, twenty four small blue orbs were letting off light as well.

All the Skills were together.

All the weapons were together.

But all the heads of history were

gone.

That's all there was to it, and yet my tears were starting to come out.

... I felt lonely now that no one was there. As a grandfather, like a father, like a brother, like a friend, and at times like a master. My ancestors had all gone away.

When I thought over how I'd been recognized by them, it made me happy as well. Yet even so, what was welling up from my chest was a sorrowful emotion.

When they were so noisy.

When I hated them so.

When it was... so fun, it had all come to an end.

I slowly sat in my chair. No, it was closer to collapsed into it. I covered my face with both hands, and hid away my own crying face. From whom? I didn't even know myself.

Stolen away by Celes, in the end my memories never came back. For the current me, the only memories I had of anyone treating me like family had come from the ancestors.

They weren't perfect people.

They all had their problems.

And they had plenty of hopeless parts.

But even so they were reliable. They supported me with their knowledge and Skills.

“When there’s that matter with Novem, I can’t even think about it anymore. Why does my chest hurt so much? When I’ve experienced parting time and again.”

Every time one of them disappeared, I had gained something. But once I was left with nothing to lose, I was filled with inexplicable sorrow.

And I recalled the Third’s words.

“His words...”

The Lyle among Lyles... so those words weren’t his way of cheering me up? The me before my memories were stolen, and the previous Lyle Novem held an attachment to. With all of them

together, the real one was me...? The one the ancestors recognized was me.

I raised my face, and looked at the Third's seat. His aloof figure was nowhere to be seen. In its place floated a sword without a blade. As I reached a hand towards it, its hilt floated my way.

When I gripped it in my hand, I could see a faint edge.

Fitting of the elusive Third, invisible, what's more a troublesome sword whose length I could regulate at will. As I gripped it in my hand, I finally understood what the Third had wanted to say.

Wiping a tear with my left hand, I

let go of the hilt in my right.

“... Just you watch. I’m everyone’s treasure child. I’ll definitely... pull it off without fail.”

I returned my mind from the Jewel to reality.

Chapter 314: 0 (Nihil)

The Third had disappeared, and no one would let their voice flow from the Jewel anymore.

From the Jewel embedded in the silver ornaments hung around my neck, even now it felt as if I'd hear something at any moment. As I carried on my boring paperwork, I got the feeling the Fourth would chime in to rebuke me. Perhaps the Third would say it was boring. What would the First have said?

The Second would probably see me doing such plain work, nod to himself and watch over me. The

Fifth would be silent. The Sixth would surely tell me to go out and play, while the Seventh would try and stop that...

“It’s no good, I can’t keep up my concentration.”

I stopped my pen and looked at the ceiling, putting my left hand over my face. I put them as if to cover my eyes, and even now, I felt there may be someone hiding and watching over me.

I had sent my mind to the Jewel a number of times.

But the result was the same. In that empty round table room was nothing but my chair and the door that continued into my room of

memories. Besides the seven weapons floating in the air, nothing showed the slightest reaction.

There, Valkyrie Unit One on standby in the room watched my behavior and prepared some tea.

I took a sip and noticed she had gotten better at brewing it than last time.

“This isn’t half bad.”

Unit One seemed delighted, but her expression didn’t change. Recently, they had begun modifying the Valkyries again, so the Valkyries were stopping by Damien and Old Letarta’s place on rotation. The first wave had yet to return, but I was curious as to what sort of change I

could expect this time around.

“That is good. At this point, I can throw that useless maid to the side whenever I see fit.”

“... Why do you guys hate each other so much?”

Useless maid likely referred to Monica. She was currently busily moving around.

It seems she had lain hands on things besides what I had requested of her, and there were complaints coming in from Lianne’s place, apparently.

Mainly from the craftsmen, ‘I’m being chased by a smiling automaton!’ or so some letters on the edge of insanity had come in.

“There is only one master. In that case, one exclusive maid is sufficient.”

“Isn’t it normal to have multiple? What do you mean by one? Aren’t you supposed to be housekeepers?”

Perhaps from Monica’s sister’s core that lay at her base, Unit one was strangely hard on Monica.

There had been reports coming in that the Valkyries’ individual traits were beginning to come out as of late, but perhaps automatons had this and that to deal with as well.

What they’d been showing interest in at this point in time was surely...

After I thought that far, I shook my head.

“Now then, let’s finish up here. I’ve got other things planned for today.”

Unit One looked at me.

“Conversing with that vixen, correct? You have got terrible taste, master.”

“Do you guys have some sort of grudge against Novem? Rather, why are you so hostile to everyone?”

Stroking the blond twin tails she shared with Monica, she put her free hand on her hip as she directed her words at me. She was identical to Monica, but her chest was perfectly level, and therein lay the difference.

“I do not know the reason, but she irritates me in an automaton sense.

My core is screaming at me to fight.”

“... What do you mean in an automaton sense? And don’t fight, that’s dangerous. That’s an order.”

When I said it was an order, Unit One bent over backwards. In accordance with her movements, her twin tails gave a violent shake.

“Oy, what’s wrong!?”

She leisurely raised her torso, correcting her posture.

“The word order shot right through my heart. To put it simply, I am aroused. If it could show it on my face... my expression would be slack, and I would be drooling.”

“You don’t have to react to everything! Don’t be so misleading! And wait, you can drool?”

While there were no problems with their performance, there was quite a problem with their personality.

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... Lianne’s room.

Unit Thirty Four who had always been by her side was absent. Lianne’s attendant Valkyrie had gone over to Damien for some alterations.

In that time frame, a different

Valkyrie hadn't been dispatched for her. Because everywhere was short-staffed. And Lianne knew and accepted that.

There had been talks of her own attendant being sent over from the Kingdom of Faunbeux. But while she didn't think her homeland would try to assassinate her at this point, Lianne had denied.

Standing from her seat, she prepared tea for herself.

She had once been unable to trust those around her, carrying out various thing on her own. So she was used to it.

"When she's here, that's trouble in itself, but it's quite a bother when

she's gone."

Saying that, she stood and took a sip of tea, when the door was burst open with good momentum. Lianne looked at the intruder who had come without so much as a knock, spitting out the tea in her mouth.

"You're- *hack*!!"

The one the chocking Lianne had seen was a smiling Unit Thirty Four. The Valkyrie that had been expressionless to that point had gotten expression added on.

"I heard, Lianne-san. That you showed your dere side, saying you did not need any maid besides me. I was so happy, I hurriedly returned on my own. Oh right, do not get

conceited. My master is Lyle-sama alone. Well, you can be second. No, thinking of the chick to come, would that be third?"

Getting her breath in order, Lianne looked at Unit Thirty Four as she wiped her mouth.

"Ah~, look at how dirty you have become."

"Who's fault do you think that is!? Rather, your expressions sure are human. Professor Damien's fixated on quite an unnecessary thing."

There, Unit Thirty Four waved her index finger left and right as she grinned.

"That is where you are wrong, little lady. We used all the money we

saved up to put out various modification proposals, and paid for their actualization."

Lianne was surprised.

"Saved up? I don't think I've paid you that much."

Unit Thirty Four formed a dark smile, as she made a gesture to indicate money with her right hand.

"The stores set up in North, South and Rhuvenns... a portion of them were shops under our management. They were so popular we even have plans to open branches in the four nation alliance."

Lianne cried out.

"What are you doing on your own!?

If you had time to earn money, then help out our side some more! We're facing extreme poverty right now!"

From Lianne- who had been left with the financial side- 's point of view, she would have liked to know of the Valkyries' surprising talents earlier.

But Unit Thirty Four...

"It was a side job on our days off, so I must refuse. If you wish to give the order no matter what, then please get our master's approval. I do want to come to your aid, but this alone I cannot concede. Ah, make sure to tell him to make his orders on the harsher side."

Her head starting to hurt, Lianne

massaged her canthus with her fingertips. She looked at Thirty Four's hair.

"... You've got it done plain long this time. You used to have it bound at the tip."

Unit Thirty Four traced her hair with her eyes.

"It broke while we were on the move. In order to show my originality, I had bought it with my meager allowance, so it was quite a shock... well, I have plenty of gold now."

While Lianne was irritated, she undid one of the strings binding her own hair. That sturdy pink-dyed string was what she used to keep

her hair out of the way while she was working.

“It will be hard to tell you apart, so use this. It’s something you won’t be able to find in these parts. It’s quite robust so it’ll last a while.”

Unit Thirty Four took the string in her hands.

“... T-trying to fish me in with something like that isn’t going to work! But I-I’ll take it anyways.”

Seeing her suddenly let out a cute voice as she fidgeted, Lianne tilted her head.

“... What are you trying to accomplish? No, what are you trying to say?”

Unit Thirty Four spoke in a bored tone.

“Che, it was a line I thought up now that I finally obtained expression, but it didn’t get across at all.”

Saying that, she slumped in depression...

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Night.

On the Balcony of Rhuvenns castle, I decided to talk with Novem.

As I went out, I found she had gotten there before me.

Despite it being summer, the outside air was pleasantly cool. I noticed Novem had prepared ice in a few places to cool the area.

To my own nervous self, I sent some encouraging words in my heart as I approached Novem.

“I’ve kept you waiting.”

Novem was smiling.

“No, you’ve come a little earlier than the appointed time.”

I looked at Novem as I mulled over what to start with. But I thought I had to tell her, so without any preface I said it.

“The heads of history in the Jewel have all disappeared. No, they’ve

left their Skills to me and fulfilled their roles."

Novem's eyes opened just a little wider at my words.

And she looked a little dispirited.

"Is that... so. That's unfortunate. Once was enough, I would have liked to meet with them."

She seemed truly regretful. And she was a little self-derisive.

"As I thought, the heads of history were creeped out by me as well."

On those words, I gave a strong denial. Rather than trying to cheer her up, it was because she had said something that didn't match up with their intent.

“That’s wrong. It’s not that you never got to meet. You were never supposed to meet... and everyone told me to look after you.”

Novem gave an immediate response.

“That’s a lie. From Fredrick-sama onwards, the Forxuz House served as a simple vassal household. Fiennes-sama and Brod-sama would never have thought anything strange about it. I’m just the daughter of a vassal, and that’s all they would have thought of me.”

It’s true that’s what they thought at first. The Fifth onwards saw Novem as the daughter of the Forxuz House. But First through Fourth were different.

“The moment the First learned of you, he was extremely flustered. And it seems everyone felt something when you sold off your dowry for my sake. They told me to take responsibility for that.”

On those nostalgic memories of Dalien, Novem laughed a bit.

“Something like that did happen. But if you believe you’ve been a burden for me on the financial front, then please worry not. I’ve received a considerable payment through all of this, and I have enough money to buy dozens of sets of trousseau.”

That’s not what I meant. Or so I wanted to say, but I felt as if there was a clear line drawn between me

and her.

The one Novem was looking at was Lyle of the Walt House. Not me as an individual.

“I have some memory of the ancestors as well. They were all wonderful people. I’d have liked to talk with them.”

They were certainly wonderful people.

“Quite a few of them were surprisingly shy. And I mistook the timing. After we met Celes, we thought it would cast doubt upon us, so I restrained myself. It was a failure, I’d like to say. Perhaps I should have opened up about them from the start. But in the end, I

never tried to let you meet them either."

In the first place a meeting would only be possible after I manifested my Second Stage Skill. Before that, it would just be taken as a rash remark.

Novem was the rebirth of an evil god? If I knew she carried on memories, perhaps my choices would have changed.

"They had a surprising number of hopeless points. Though I'm sure you already know."

There, Novem's reaction showed a slight change.

"That isn't the case. They're all wonderful people. Maizel-sama as

well, originally, he was an exceptionally kind and strong person, and…”

I felt something was off. Novem’s tone had grown stronger.

“Really? The First was a rude one, and the Second was too earnest. Well, plain, perhaps? I get the feeling the man himself was quite mindful of it. The Third was a schemer…”

Once I said that much, Novem took a step forwards, and looked up into my face. In her eyes I could see the color of anger in no small concentration.

“Basil-sama was a wonderful person who cut open the dangerous forests,

and got together all the surrounding people practically by himself! Crassel-sama was a person who endured and persevered no matter how harsh the times. Sleigh-sama was a gallant man who threw down his life and fought for everyone's sake! I won't let anyone insult them, even if it's you, Lyle-sama!"

I wonder what it is, Novem's opinion was right. She was right, but I found myself not agreeing.

"No, I mean the Fourth was a miser who's actual hobby was counting the gold coins in his safe you know. The Fifth failed in his family relations and sought solace from animals. The Sixth was a delinquent who ran out of the house, and the

Seventh, My grandfather... was a pervert?"

While it's true they had their amazing parts, Novem wasn't looking at anything else. No, even if she carried on the memories, perhaps the ancestors hadn't shown off those sides. But her vision was so beautified I couldn't accept it.

"Take it back! Max-sama really worked hard to make the territory abundant! Fredrick-sama did his best alone in that cruel situation. Fiennes-sama definitely did run out of the house! But he gained lots of experience, and became a splendid head of the house! Brod-sama was such a splendid man that even Bahnseim relied on him! Take it

back!... I'm begging you."

... I somewhat understood the reason I couldn't accept it. I couldn't stand Novem's words as if she understood them from only seeing one side to them.

That means she wasn't looking at any other part of the ancestors. As if those no-good portions were just the useless leftovers, and I hated that.

It's true the First was rude and violent. But he was the first person who recognized me. A pure and genuine person.

The Second was definitely plain. But he was really prone to worrying, and... an earnest man.

The Third was a schemer. But he had decisiveness, and was a heroic person.

The Fourth was a miser. But that was because he worked so hard to get that money flowing into the land.

The Fifth had failed in his family relations. But he made sure he was the one hurt most. He was a kind person.

The Sixth was a delinquent. But he knew when to act, and he was a strong man pulling everyone behind him.

The Seventh... was a pervert. But as he felt the weight of all history's achievements pushing down on

him, he lived a strong way of life.

“You were only looking at the outside, and you never saw what was within. Is it really so bad? Can you really not forgive they had no-good parts to them? There was never a perfect person in our Walt House!”

Novem grabbed my hands. She was gripping them tightly, and I couldn’t think of that power coming from the narrow arms of a woman.

“What do you mean by no-good parts? Of course I recognize them! But making fun of them so… why do you speak of them so!?”

“Because the good parts and the bad parts… I’ve seen them all.

Heard them all. Was taught them all. So I look up to them everything included. It's not like all of them loved battle."

... Or so I'd like to think.

"They were kind, and they all had things they wanted to do. And yet, it's because the surrounding situation didn't permit it that they fought... that they protected!"

Novem looked at me.

"I never said I wanted everyone to love fighting. All I wanted to express was just how wonderful the gentlemen of the Walt House were for struggling through whatever circumstance befell them."

I grabbed Novem's hand.

“I said I would aim for peace. I don’t know what sort of thing that is. But when I said it, they said it was alright if I reached out for it.”

Novem looked at my face in surprise. And her expression tunred sorrowful.

She slowly parted from me and wiped her tears.

“... Is that... so. But even so, I...”

I spoke to Novem.

“Hey, how do you feel about it? Not the Goddess or Evil God Novem. Not the previous generation Novem or whoever came before that. Can’t you make your own feelings clear?”

Novem slowly left the balcony.

“Novem!”

“You’ll have to excuse me for the day. I have an early morning tomorrow.”

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... Novem walked down the night corridor without a light.

“... I have to protect him. The Walt House is what I longed for... I have to protect Lyle-sama.”

She muttered as she called up the large quantity of memories... no, records within her. The previous generation Novem who swore to

watch over the Walt House. Her parting with Septem and the others that named her an Evil God.

Among them, Novem recalled the back of a single woman.

The woman wore a lab coat.

Her long hair was colored a pink blonde, and both her hands were thrust into the pockets of her white coat.

『Novem, I won't deny what you're doing. But I won't deny Septem and the others either. So put away that dangerous thing.』

Was Novem pointing a weapon at her? She couldn't recall the fuzzy parts.

At this point there was some noise mixed in, and she couldn't recall it perfectly. But the conversation played back, and Novem could remember it well.

『Septem you see, she thinks humans are weak. She's sure of it. But you and Octō are too convinced that humans are strong.』

"What did I reply back then..."

The woman in a lab coat looked over Novem.

『Hey, I can understand why you'd be irked at being called a Goddess and such. And you can't forgive Septem for doing her best to play the part, right? But you see, we can't be there to watch over humans

forever.』

To the woman's words, Novem...

"Shut it. Shut up!"

『I'm a failure without much power to me at all. I don't have the power to bring forth anything like you guys. The most I can do is live in this world of ours. And my body will fall apart far before any of you.』

While she had given up, the woman was cheerful.

"I have... to watch over him to the end. I'm not wrong. Septem... Septem betrayed us, so..."

The woman smiled.

『I, you see, I think I'm going to try

and become one of the elves you created. While I could never do any more than watch, I'll at least pass down the message so the failure doesn't repeat.♩

Failure. Right, a failure. Humanity had failed.

"And that's why we were born in the first place, dammit!!"

Crying out, Novem let her tears flow as she ruffled her side ponytail into a mess and sat on the spot.

"There's no way I have an individual self at this point. I have to watch over him. I have to watch over him to the end, or else..."

And the woman told Novem with a smile.

『Novem, I like songs. I like stories. If I'm ever reborn, I'm sure... I'll sing songs for you.』

There, perhaps hearing the ruckus, someone drew close.

"Novem, what's wrong? Did something happen? Are you crying?"

Worrying for her was Eva. Pink blonde hair, and her elf-characteristic tapered ears. She had vestiges of the woman in the lab coat.

"... Nihil, why are you..."

Eva and Nihil's forms overlapped.

Novem collapsed in the corridor.

“Hey, Novem!”

Eva continued calling out to her…

Chapter 315: Moving Fortress

“I definitely did say it. That just like your large Porter, it would be nice if we had one we could spend the night in. I did say it, but… let’s learn some self-restraint, Damien.”

The allied forces gathering in Rhuvenns one after the next.

The place we’d prepared was an open space without anything, or rather a grassy plain and yet now it seemed as if a large town had formed. There were lines of tents, among them merchants peddling their wares and troupes performing their acts as well.

In a corner, a few dozen of Damien's large-scale Porters were lined up. In order to move large numbers of goods, they were specially made to use magic ore as their power source. In regards to transport, it's a fact that Porter had made it considerably easier.

Damien held his staff mismatched with his small build over his shoulders, yawning as he looked at an especially large Porter.

"It wasn't me. Though I helped with the blueprints. And I worked with the automatons on the fuel source and such, but the one who proposed it was old Letarta."

I sent a glance to Letarta, his tools in hand as he issued orders to his

apprentices. He stuck up a thumb and directed me a smile.

“It’s a man’s romance. Because a moving fortress is a badass thing to have.”

He does have a point.

... I mean no!

“Just how much money did it cost? And wait, within that harsh schedule, you made something like this?”

In regards to my question, Damien seemed uninterested.

“Isn’t is fine? He called it a fortress, but it’s really a mobile workshop. Automaton maintenance , equipment maintenance and

production. The only other thing it has is a few cannons."

Looking up at the small mobile fortress, I noticed the surrounding soldiers watching it with their mouths stuck open, and my urge to remonstrate someone for this didn't die down.

Damien smiled.

"There's a room for your party as well. Though it's a narrow one. And it can deploy a stage to make you conspicuous. Like this."

As Damien held up his staff, the moving fortress slowly began to move. On the front portion a stage definitely did rise, and it was conspicuous enough

He put his staff against his shoulder.

“It’s that, isn’t it? Your tactics are fundamentally defensive, so I think this machine to make an encampment at a moment’s notice will prove quite useful.”

I looked up at the fortress.

“Rather than useful, in the first place this thing’s magic ore expenditure will…”

Old Letarta cut in with a smile.

“Listen to this. You see that smokestack over there? That’s the motion engine, and by shoveling magic stones into it, it’s been made to move by the power of steam. We weren’t able to turn a profit, but it

wasn't our money we were using to begin with, so we thought it would be fine if we pushed our limits."

"... The one paying is me, right? The one with the obligation to pay in the end is me, right!?"

Damien and old Letarta averted their eyes. These guys had made me a sacrifice to their own fantasies. This is no good. They were the types I should never have put together and left alone.

The pair let out some thin voices.

"... We did properly answer to your demands."

"Y-yes. We answered them perfectly. And we did properly build others as well."

They didn't get it at all.

"You didn't answer my demands at all on the financial front! What's with this, when I thought things were taking a turn for the better, in the end this is what I get!"

The ones who raced over at my scream were Valkyrie Units One, Two and Three. They were wearing blue armor of higher quality than before. The clothing they wore underneath was white, and made in way that would make me accept if someone called them true Valkyries. Their binders looked even more wing-like than before.

Well, the contents were still no good.

“Oh? So you’re financially over after all. Well, I knew it would happen.”

Unit One said as if she knew it, and Units Two and Three nodded as well.

If you knew, then say something.

“You’re all getting punished for this later.”

There the three looked at me with leisurely smile, where Unit One upened her mouth as a representative. Her expression as if she was delighted.

“A punishment! We’ll... be waiting for it!”

It’s no good. There’s not a decent one around me.

At that moment, Vera walked over to me. Behind her were the sailors carrying parcels and guns.

“Vera? Why are you here?”

Vera pointed at the moving fortress.

“I’m the financer of that thing. It’s really my father, but as things were going we realized you wouldn’t be able to burden the costs so we dealt with it ourselves. And isn’t this pretty much a ship on land? Then we’re the ones most suited to move it. The fuel’s pretty much the same anyways.”

Come to think of it, Vera’s ship had a similar motion engine loaded onto it. If you put magic stones in its hearth, it definitely did...

“Eh? You’re coming along too? No, that’s dangerous…”

“It’s dangerous for everyone. What’s more, I’m used to fight scenes, and everyone else is an engineer, so they’re amateurs when it comes to operating it.”

Letarta folded his arms as he nodded.

“She’s not wrong. But we never knew you were coming, young lady.”

Vera let out a sigh.

“I don’t intend to concede this right to another. Well, when I think of it as a ship on land, I do have some interest. And wait, this is quite large scale.”

Vera looked around and was shocked by the scale. But this wasn't all our forces. There were armies gathering elsewhere as well.

The main force I was stationed at. And two detached forces. These three armies were just short of crossing two hundred thousand. Adding the alliance and increasing our forces by absorbing in the soldiers that ran and the bandits.

"The main body numbers a hundred thousand. Besides this, there are two armies of fifty thousand. The first is under Baldoir and the other under Maksim-san."

"Oh that's a surprise. What about General Blois?"

“I’m leaving command of the main force to him. This is basically going to end once we march into the country’s east, so I doubt there will be a large battle until Centralle makes a move.”

Right... come so far, the Walt House’s defeat was working its charm. Among the feudal nobles, there didn’t exist a lord who could put up a decent fight against us.

Even if they tried to get together and fight, if you asked if feudal lords could just get together and fight properly, the answer was ‘no’. Not wanting to serve under one another was a reason, but the largest problem was that they wouldn’t be able to gather an army to combat two hundred thousand

troops.

Bahnseim was considerably weakened.

“By Rauno-san’s investigation if they were capable of decent judgement, they’d have switched to our side. Of all else, Bahnseim’s royalty in Centralle hasn’t moved in the slightest. No matter how many times they request aid, there’s no signs of them making any move.”

Listening in to the talk, Damien spoke uninterestedly.

“Couldn’t that mean there are lords who chose not to choose? See, there are quite a few people who think you just have to join the side that comes on top in the end.”

Vera nodded.

“That’s right. People who can’t read the flow. There could be a relatively large amount of them among nobles.”

I addressed them.

“I, you see, I circulated notice for everyone to make it clear who they sided with. And in truth, there are some who heard the rumors and joined up with us or made their escape. When I’ve done that much, siding with no one is no good, right? Sorry, but I’ll be taking their land and treasures. It’s a different story if they have a reason they can’t move. But there are houses that chose to side with us whose head is absent and whose successor

hasn't even reached ten."

Compared to those houses, what should I say about the ones who properly have their lords yet are waiting and watching? And there was another troublesome problem.

There were plenty to aim to do the same thing Bahnseim did when Agrissa was defeated. Meaning those that were selling themselves to me at a high price.

I smiled.

"Well, I'd like some land post-war, so we'll need quite a number of feudal lords to disappear. Just with some light calculations, divvying up Beim and Rhuvenns isn't nearly enough. If we break it up, we

wouldn't be able to oppose other countries, our authority will fade, and we won't be able to glare them to silence."

Vera looked at me.

"You're quite dry when it comes to these thing. Looking at your usual conduct, I thought your pity would come out"

I recalled myself not too long ago.

"This and that happened and it's rubbed off on me. I do love me some pretty ideals, but both me and Celes have earned too much hatred. I want to make it so I can win and leave it to the next generation without issue."

Anyways, I wanted to get my hands

on a stable foothold. For that sake there were too many feudal lords in the way.

Old Letarta looked over at me.

“Bro, you’re quite the villain.”

I smiled.

“That’s where you’re wrong. I mean I’m… the great evil who’ll stain the pages of history. But if I win I’m the hero.”

I mean, to make sure we and Bahnseim weren’t the only ones exhausted from this, I had dragged the entire continent into this decisive battle.

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… Rauno had infiltrated Bahnseim.

He was in a town governed by a Bahnseimian feudal noble, exchanging info with his subordinates in the bar. When it came to bars, they were supposed to grow rowdy come the fall of night, but from the food they put out and the scarcity of customers, Rauno could sense Bahnseim was considerably exhausted.

One of his subordinates disguised as a traveler looked around.

“It’s all run down. And the food they put out is terrible.”

On the plate rested a thin soup and a small piece of bread. Other than that were just a few scraps of snack to go with the drink.

The ones playing the part of travelers were a two-man elven party. Even if they travelled around, elves didn't arouse much suspicion, what's more, once he became a knight, the two of them had volunteered for service.

"According to our brethren, everywhere's the same."

"But Centralle's a bit of an ominous one. Even if they sing their songs and gather customers around, it's almost as if they can't feel any spirit from them... and they don't know the definition of liveliness.

According to him, it's as if the fire's gone out. It was simply too ominous that he fled as soon as he could."

Rauno put the gathered information in order.

"There will be nothing but complaints no matter what route they choose. The food shortages are terrible. There are too many places that won't make it through the winter."

As he worried, Rauno thought over something that would prove even more troubling than that.

(Even so, what reasons do the feudal lords I can't think to have been charmed have to follow Bahnseim?)

There were territories that had been charmed and proclaimed they'd put up a do-or-die resistance. But on the other hands, there were plenty of territories with no relation to Celes at all that didn't try going to Lyle's side. He got the feeling it wasn't out of a sense of justice, or because Lyle and Celes were from the same Walt House.

He addressed his men.

"To finish it off, we'll be going to Dalien. The plans to meet up there."

Seeing them nod, Rauno worried for the state of their final destination Dalien...

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... Heading the transport unit, Clara's eyebrows twitched as she watched the scene unfolding before her eyes.

Field potatoes gathered from North Beim were loaded and overflowing from the wooden crates in what clearly seemed like overkill. Brimming with vitality, they were a troublesome potato variant that would continue to multiply if you left them be.

In places that existed beyond human hands, they existed in too-large quantities. In managed places they were disposed of in moderation.

The reason you couldn't get your hands on them in much of Bahnseim was because most of the area had been settled. Yet once the stocking of field potatoes had begun in North Beim, the city's populace had found loads and brought them in.

A reaction fitting of the people of Beim, whose level of motivation completely changed when they knew money was involved.

And looking at the mountain of potatoes, Adele who had proclaimed she'd pay for them was making a pale face.

"... It's true there's been some confusion from last year, but for there to be so many... what should I

do. Our funds are... we've secured food rations but our funds are..."

The one standing beside her was an individual who wasn't supposed to be there by any means... Maksim.

"It's alright, Adele-sama. This Maksim shall collect money from all those that wish to exchange it for food stock."

Adele looked at Maksim.

"I'll leave it to you Maksim. Otherwise it'll hinder our plans."

Clara looked at the two of them.

"I have no obligation to say it, but this is your parting before a great war, so could you stray from the topic of money? And this pile of

field potatoes... even if you prepare them well, they're still considerably terrible, right?"

Their hands gripping one another, Adele and Maksim turned to Clara.

"It's the conclusion I thought up to resolve our food problems. We can use them to survive the winter, so isn't it fine? A better alternative to dying of starvation."

"That's right, Clara-dono. A great achievement from Adele-sama."

Clara raised her glasses a bit, letting the lenses catch the light.

"... The soldiers are becoming depressed, worrying over the notion that these may become their meals as well. You properly explained it

right? It's lowering our morale quite a bit."

Adele's expression stiffened with an, 'Eh!?' as she turned to Maksim with stiff movements. Maksim shook his head.

"We haven't received any such orders. Rather, this is a problem of the army as a whole, so doesn't it fall under Lyle-dono and Lianne-dono's jurisdiction?"

Clara looked at Adele.

"I hear that Adele-san was taking responsibility of the field potato matter, and she was completely in charge of it. I was worried that no order came no matter how much time had passed... looked like

you've done it."

As Adele broke into a cold sweat, Clara smiled.

"That's why they call you a downgraded Lianne."

There, Adele yelled in her direction.

"You're the only one who calls me that! You listening? I was busy with the management and revival of Beim here!"

Maksim came around to support her.

"That's right! Adele-sama was busy!"

But Clara scoffed.

“Lianne-san was managing Rhuvenns as she looked over the whole. Well, do your best. And isn’t it about time you noticed the surrounding mood? When the decisive battle’s so close at hand, you’ve let this dubious air persist to this point... go get married or something already. Baldoir-san’s already settled with Alette-san, and they’ve held the ceremony already.”

Hearing that, Maksim began to fidget. Musing over how it wasn’t cute at all when a large man made such a gesture, Clara looked at Adele.

She was tilting her head.

“... Who’s marrying who?”

When she said such a thing, Maksim went down. Clara seemed taken aback as she approached Maksim.

“Do your best. I’m rooting for you. Also, Ludmilla-san is making arrangements to send you a bride. Keep on your toes.”

On the ground having crumbled at the knees Maksim spoke to Clara.

“... I-I’ll do my best.”

He said...

Chapter 316: Common Sense

... Miranda looked down over the lines of soldiers from the moving fortress.

On the stage that had been prepared stood Lyle in his armor. On top of his various gestures, Eva was putting on a musical accompaniment from the shadows, all while using her Skill to make his voice reach over two hundred thousand soldiers.

“It sure was a swift road to get here.”

One of the largest factors was the

luck Lyle had been blessed with. No, you could call it chance.

To those making preparations, a pinch was a form of chance. Under a hopeless situation, Lyle took advantage of the recapture of Zayin to expand his influence.

While Lyle was once a good kid from some well-to-do upbringing, at this point he was giving an address to an army of hundreds of thousands.

"... If we wished to be clever, then our best bet would be to wait for Bahnseim's exhaustion before our invasion. We would surely be able to achieve victory without any effort on our part. There would be no need for us to push ourselves to

fight now."

Listening to Lyle's words as he suddenly denied this invasion, Miranda looked around. Lined up near Lyle were the ones who had fought alongside him from his early days: Novem, Aria, Shannon, Clara, Eva and May. Monica was working behind the scenes.

"But even as we speak, blood continues to flow. If we leave it be, Bahnseim will surely spread death throughout the entire continent. I cannot permit it. Overlooking evil and waiting until victory makes its own way to us; can you really call that justice!? No, that is no justice of mine! In order to save this continent, in order to bring about peace! No matter how difficult a

battle it may be, I have resolved to fight! Ladies, gentlemen. Gallant soldiers! I beseech you lend me your strength! For justice, to save the continent from the evil deeds of Bahnseim, I beseech you lend me your lives! The outcome of this battle hinges on the work of all the heroic men and women of the army!"

He declared they were justice, and prepared a just cause of saving the continent. Even if he didn't exaggerate it, word of Celes' evil deeds had spread.

And being short on time was something Lyle shared. If he spent the time, he could definitely get his forces more orderly. He could assemble an army more powerful.

But rather than winning a war, the existence called Celes was too dangerous. Rather than winning a war, Lyle thought that winning against Celes would prove the more difficult.

Vera who moved the fortress watched Lyle from the window of a room. In the lines of troops were the forms of Gracia and Elza.

Where the higher-ups marched were Thelma, Aura and Gastone from Zayin. From Lorphys, Annerinne and the prime minister Lonbolt. There were the forms of merchants as well. Fidel, for one, seemed quite bored with his life.

Lianne and Adele were in that line as well.

And Baldoir and Maksim who commanded armies of their own stood lined in their armor.

“This battle will be remembered by the ages. Gallant soldiers. Win and add your name to the ranks of heroes! Justice is on our side! The goddess smiles down upon us!”

Standing to Miranda’s side, Shannon was positioning herself so the soldiers couldn’t see as she yawned.

“He sure runs his mouth. Fearing that Celes will be absorbed by Agrissa, he’s just trying to attack as quickly as he can. And we’re attacking because we know we’ll win anyways, right?”

The harvest was over, and the times had calmed down. It was the time of year when you could gather the most soldiers, and the most convenient for a battle. That was the same for Bahnseim's side as well.

But in the exhausted land of Bahnseim, Centralle was the only one left who could put up any decent resistance according to the information they'd gathered.

"Knowing you'll win without a doubt lowers your guard, and lowering your guard is dangerous. A sense of danger puts some desperation in your step. And it's not like you're certain to win as long as you've got a large army together."

Miranda looked at the looks on the faces of the lines of soldiers. They were showing some motivation hearing the word justice. In all actuality, they did believe themselves to be in the right. If they didn't think so, they wouldn't fight. If it were for their families' sakes, they'd take their weapons. But in a distant land, a place where none could tell if it would even benefit their homes at all, it was difficult to find a reason to fight on.

A just cause was necessary. No matter how grand an illusion it may be.

"They're all looking at him with faces that know too well how he turned down a large army with a small force. It's irritating. I mean,

it's like they'll only ever fight if they have the absolute advantage."

"And preparing such a situation is ours and Lyle's job. Well, just leave your complaints there."

Instead of the Katana hung at his waist, Lyle held up an ornamental sword for good show. The soldiers answered his voice and raised their cries.

The air shook, as if their zeal was to blow away the morning cold.

"... All troops, advance!"

By Eva's Skill, Lyle's voice reached every single one of the gathered troops...

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… As Lyle marched, Lianne had work in the rear, so she was to return to the castle at once.

But Unit Thirty Four had a duty to guard Lyle, so she couldn't accompany her this time. In front of the carriage, the Valkyrie conversed with Lianne.

"Even if I'm not with you, you can't put in an extra serving of sugar."

At Unit Thirty Four's spiel, a vein was popping up on Lianne's forehead.

"You're truly a rude person to the end."

Unit Thirty Four touched a hand to her mouth.

“Too bad. I’m an automaton.”

Seeing Unit Thirty Four’s laugh, Lianne let out a sigh.

“Come back soon. I’ll work you to the bone.”

The Valkyrie smiled. Not in her usual maid uniform, she wore a blue set of armor with a wing-like binder on her back. For the Valkyries’ usage, there were simple horse-shaped automatons prepared, and to Unit Thirty Four’s side was a horse of clockwork construction.

Saying there was no elegance to a bike, the Valkyries were quite insistent on the horses.

“Is that supposed to be tsundere? Unfortunately something of that level is nothing more than a reward to us. Even if you say you hate me, I shall keep serving you until you are ruined without me.”

The tip of her hair had been fastened with the pink string she received from Lianne.

“... Hah, no matter what I say you find delight. You must live quite the happy life there. Well, it’s good to have a person who’ll let you work them to the bone. And it’s good you don’t betray.”

On Lianne’s speech, Unit Thirty four touched her mouth with her hand.

“If you bare fangs at my master that is a separate story. Do not worry. The chick alone I will take responsibility for and raise. Like a loving mother, like a loving sibling, like a loving lover... wait, what!? Could it be that way would be the most interesting?”

As something quite unsettling ran through Unit Thirty Four’s head, Lianne gave it a good whack.

“Just go already! When you get back, I’ll be correcting that personality of yours.”

As Thirty Four got on her horse she smiled.

“That’s impossible. This is the standard installation.”

She said as she parted from Lianne...

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While we marched, our main force generally consisted of a hundred thousand.

Baldoir and Maksim-san each led fifty thousand down a separate route, and to make sure we weren't assaulted from behind, we surprised the important points as we advances.

However...

"Commence the bombardment!"

On the third floor of the moving fortress was the machine built to move it. There, Vera and the Trēs House captain and sailors operated the fortress.

As fire was set to the cannons protruding from its mechanical bulk, the fortress shook.

By the bombardment Vera ordered from the moving fortress, the outer wall of a Bahnseim fort was easily breached.

A fort with only a handful of knights capable of using magic was no foe of ours. The white flag came up at once, and I gave the order to take the fort. With that alone, the forces moved and suppressed it.

“There’s nothing to do.”

“Sitting quietly is also a job. Well, to the rank and file, this is their time to earn some merits. Don’t do anything too crazy.”

“I know.”

General Blois was nearby, sitting in a chair.

I had taken ten thousand off the main force, left them to Aria and Miranda, and turned them towards the lords who wouldn’t make their stance clear.

Monica nearby skillfully poured tea in the swaying fortress and offered it to me.

“Message in from Miranda-san.

Alongside Elza-san, she has successfully taken the designated village. Just surrounding them was enough for them to surrender."

General Blois took some tea as well.

"I'm sure they would. From the start of our march, it's only taken a few days to get quite a distance. We've got a momentum where we'll crush them down if they oppose. What do you intend to do to the lords who've surrendered?"

I took a sip of tea as I spoke.

"I'll lower their status to knighthood and send them out pioneering."

"So you're driving them off to the corners of the continent? That's one

way to get hated."

I laughed a bit.

"I'm already hated plenty."

There Monica spoke to me.

"Aria-san is facing a hard battle."

My eyebrow twitched.

"A hard battle even with Gracia by her side? So they had some talented ones left?"

The place I left to Aria wasn't on a scale to take on an army of ten thousand. As I wondered what sort of problem could have happened, she continued on.

"No, it seems they are carrying out

negotiations for surrender, but talks aren't getting through to the other party. They demand peace for their territory, and a worthy status once a chicken reigns victorious. In the case you refuse, they are willing to put up a do-or-die resistance."

General Blois made an understanding expression.

"Ah, they're out there. The feudal lords who don't look at the surrounding situation. As I recall, he should be a Baronet, and a vassal to another."

I reached my hand towards the Jewel, but partway there, I clenched my fist and endured it.

(I'm too quick to try and rely on

them. That's no good at all.)

I recalled the words of my ancestors.

"Tell Aria I'm leaving it to her. I could go out if I had to, but this is something she needs to learn. If there's no way she can work it out, tell her to send another message. And make preparations to send reinforcements of twenty thousand at a moment's notice."

General Blois spoke.

"You should have assigned her someone good at negotiations."

I smiled.

"Well, she's got to be able to do this much. And an even tougher

opponent awaits right ahead."

The general made quite a reluctant face.

"Ah, the feudal lord in question. If this is the vassal's attitude, perhaps the vassaler is just as bad."

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... With the negotiations left to her, Aria faced Gracia.

The reply from the Valkyrie was, 'all yours,' so Aria and Gracia were mulling their heads over it.

Gracia's line of sight was swimming

around the tent.

“W-what do we do? I can usually handle these sorts of negotiations with power, but should we invade with a few thousand to show off our might?”

Aria was troubled. Gracia was even more of a muscle head than she was, but she never thought she’d be this inept at everything apart from battle. Since she was leading a single country, she had thought she would at least be good at negotiations, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

“No, that’s not quite right. They’ve already said they’d surrender, so we’ve got to negotiate, for argument’s sake.”

But Gracia cried out.

“Then you mean to say you’ll accept those tones!? When we’re seizing the other territories, what’s more, apprehending their lords, that guy alone gets his safety guaranteed!? It would be much quicker just to invade and take it!”

The territory only had a few hundred soldiers, but they were quite strong-willed.

“I can’t comprehend why they’d be so stubborn either!”

There, a knight entered the tent.

“Um, they’re getting impatient over when you’re going to send the negotiator.”

When Aria and Gracia turned towards him, the knight let out an, ‘Eeek!’ The two women hurriedly formed tranquility on their faces and sent him back peacefully.

Aria spoke.

“A-anyways, we have to teach him the reality of the matter.”

Gracia made a reluctant face.

“I don’t think talks will get through. He’s looking down on us for some reason.”

When they were leading an army of such scale, Aria never thought their opponent could act so stubborn. And as Gracia said, she thought it would have been much easier if had come down to a battle...

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... On the other hands, on Miranda's side.

Sitting in a chair of her tent, she folded her legs in her armor.

There was a Baronet before her eyes, trying his best to plead for his territory's stability. Without a negotiator role to mediate, she had called right for the feudal lord.

"... We have no choice but to follow our lord's will. I'd like you to take our circumstance into consideration."

Miranda directed the feudal lord a smile.

“So you’re fine if you’re attacked, overthrown and destroyed in our march? And you’ve officially declared you’d side with the throne of Bahnseim, did you not? When you proclaimed your hostility, I don’t think you understand your position.”

The Baronet… speaking to his territory’s scope, he was a lord with a few hundred soldiers under his belt, but the lord he was vassaled to, the one with the largest land in the area was of the Bahnseim faction, so he had declared hostility towards Lyle. When it really came down to it, no aid was coming from his lord, and the enemy forces numbered

several hundred thousand. What's more, ten thousand soldiers had already come to surround them.

Even if the lord and other vassals scraped what they had together, first off, it would be impossible to put out ten thousand troops form this territory.

"... Your territory is confiscated. If you want your family name to live on, then start over from knight rank. You're permitted the right to claim uncultivated land. If you don't like that, then fight until you're the last one standing. Of course... I wonder who your people will be siding with."

On Miranda's words, the feudal lord made a pale expression. From the

peoples' point of view, it was a light sentence if they could get off with a simple change of lord.

"It's a good opportunity to test just how beloved you were by your people. Go forth and prepare yourself. I'll give you the time."

If he was beloved by his populace, there was a possibility they'd help him resist to the bitter end. But prior investigation had already made clear that wasn't happening.

"I do hope you're not killed by your own people."

Miranda said it to him with a smile.

A cold sweat flowed down Elza nearby as she watched Miranda.

Watching over the Baronet as he led his knights from the tent, the Valkyrie on duty offered a word.

“With this, you have suppressed all the designated villages. I will send in the report.”

As Miranda stood, she asked the Valkyrie.

“So how are things going on Aria’s side?”

“... Negotiations are not going anywhere. It seems her opponent is making things difficult.”

“Aria, what are you doing. Good grief...”

Perhaps Elza thought it strange, so she asked Miranda.

“Look at the scale of our army. I’m sure that his lord would hole himself up in his own territory. Why did that baronet think reinforcements were on their way?”

Miranda looked at her.

“Even if reinforcements didn’t come, he’s survived by changing over to whatever side came on top. To this point that had always been normal, so he grew panicked when he heard his land was confiscated. See, even if you take away the land, you still need someone to manage it, right?”

“No I admit it’s necessary, but in that case, doesn’t that make it dangerous now that this area’s manager is gone?”

Miranda smiled.

“It’s fine. This place will become one of the lands we’ll give out as a reward later. The rewards we can give are limited, so this area’s just going to have to become a sacrifice. They were unlucky. Well, a lack of luck is a fatal defect to one who stands above others. So this place will cleanly be up and gone. It’s their fault for thinking their provincial rule was going to carry on forever.”

Elza swore to herself she wouldn’t go against Miranda...

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... On the other hand, on Aria's side.

"Confiscation of the territory is out of the question! If we lose power, you think rule will be possible!?"

The strong-willed negotiator knight was a middle-aged, bearded man. He boasted a loud voice, and no matter how many times they explained it, Aria side's words weren't getting through.

"In the first place, what is the meaning of enlisting women in military service!? Your side's shorthandedness is clear enough, and if you don't have our cooperation, you will be unable to manage this territory! You think we can hand over the land we worked so hard to establish order in to such

folk!?”

It’s not as if everything he said was wrong. But despite this level of will he displayed, the other party was of losing standing.

Gracia spoke irritatedly.

“Then go back and prepare for war. If our words are not enough for you, we’ll make it clear on the battlefield.”

The negotiator.

“We’ve already voiced our surrender! To attack those who’ve surrendered to you, and you still call yourselves knights!? You’re no different from bandits lacking in common sense!”

Aria addressed the negotiator.

“And that ain’t the attitude of someone who’s surrendered! You listenin’? We’re telling you our conditions are the confiscation of the territory and its wealth. We’ll spare the life of the lord responsible.”

“What ignorance! I can see you know not the manners of war. There is no way this territory can be left to such a person. Call your superior!”

The country called Bahnseim was a large one. That’s precisely why when it came to wars between territories that wetn beyond skirmishes, taking everything from the smaller territories of vassals

and the like would bring about problems in rule. Rule between different parts of Bahnseim was relatively similar so upon victory they'd take everything, vassals included, or perhaps just take a portion of the vassals for their own.

While there were times some fell to ruin, if they surrendered, accepting them in was the common sense of Bahnseim. This was a national policy, and Beim and other places did not practice it.

What's more, perhaps the lord had told the negotiator to pull out the conditions no matter the costs, but the man was quite desperate as if his life was on the line.

With blue veins rising on their

foreheads, Aria and Gracia carried an air as if they'd cut down the negotiator at any moment.

"You'll pull your blades!? If you're to cut down the messenger, the nature of your lord shall be known! Now kill me! Kill me and display my head if you will!"

The resident Valkyrie let out a sigh.

"Hah, the two of you come over here. There is a message from my master."

Once the Valkyrie whispered into their ears, they turned back to the negotiator. Feeling anxious as she was, Aria spoke.

"... The lives of you and your family are guaranteed. And you're a

retainer, right? If it's now, while you'll be sent off to uncultivated land, we'll prepare the title of knight and the funds for you to make a start. While you'll be in a remote region, we guarantee you won't be vassal to another. If you have anyone taken hostage, we will send around hands to rescue them."

The negotiator man's eyes opened wide as his face turned bright red. When they thought he was going to yell again.

"... Um, my daughter's been married off, so I'd like if you could send word to that house as well. I've been in the care of the house she married into quite a bit. If you do, I'll make preparations to accept your terms at once! I'll be able to

persuade the others!”

He folded so easily...

Chapter 317: Return

... As Lyle's main camp began its advance, Cartaffs had moved as well.

They shared a border, and that land had always been one with plenty of skirmishes to speak of.

When it came to invasion, Bahnseim showed a reaction at once.

At a stronghold in Bahnseim before the full-blown invasion of Cartaffs, a knight help his mouth open as he watched the scene from atop the fort.

"... That can't be. Why are there

flags besides Cartaffs' raised!?"

The flags of Cartaffs' neighboring countries.

And before the army they had never seen before, the knight in charge of the fort sent a messenger towards Centralle at once.

"Request reinforcements from Centralle. This fort won't hold for long!"

While the messenger hurriedly raced off, the armies glared at one another across a river.

But even if the unprepared Bahnseim tried to gather hands, what they could amass was ten thousand at most.

“While they’re making a mess of the east, the queen of Cartaffs makes her move... but even if the east has fallen, there are still several hundreds of thousands of troops stationed in the south and west. Centralle still stands; we still have power to spare!”

The commander who said it so the surroundings knights and soldiers could hear was trying to put them at ease with his words.

But a messenger raced in to the fort protected the north. Carrying news that Faunbeux had moved, and the Margrave of Resno had turned coat. That in the south, the countries centered around Djanpear were moving...

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... From atop her horse, Ludmilla looked at the fort across the river.

Many times had she launched an attack on that fort, at times taking and protecting it herself. Snatched back and forth, it was something of a symbol between Cartaffs and Bahnseim.

“Now then, I think it’s about time the messenger arrived.”

The Valkyrie to her side called over.

“Was there any meaning in purposely delaying your advance?

You don't seem very motivated about all this."

Ludmilla looked at the Valkyrie as she giggled to herself.

"It goes without saying that it's better to win without fighting. If I let myself be fashionably late, on top of them learning reinforcements weren't going to come, the information would have spread of the attack on Bahnseim from all fronts. The enemy morale will plummet."

The Valkyrie faced forwards.

"If you're late to meet up, are you fine with using that as your excuse?"

Ludmilla wore a white, expensive-

looking fur over the leather armor that covered her entire body. Over her shoulder she leaned her long-sword, still in its sheath.

“The north is the closest to Centralle. I’d rather refrain from diminishing my troops in a desire to be first. And the time we meet up is important. If we’re the first to crumble, it will affect the morale of our alliance.”

Acting as she sought profit for herself, Ludmilla grinned as she watched the approaching envoy of Bahnseim they’d sent over for negotiations...

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... On the western front, having safely crossed through Margrave Resno's territory, the armies centered around Faunbeux had begun their march.

The area's barons, viscounts and varied feudal nobles gathered their vassals, showing preparations for a struggle to the bitter end, but no one had expected the Margrave tasked with protecting the border to let Faunbeux through without a fight.

Their preparations didn't make it in time, and before they could meet up, many of them were crushed individually.

Faunbeux enthusiastically used this chance to reclaim the land the Walt House once shaved away from them, while Varius Resno infiltrated the new land he was to be granted and confirmed the territory.

He occupied the mansion of one of the barons, letting the Resno army use it as a stronghold.

The baron dragged out before him was bound with rope, lain down on his side.

“Margrave!? Do you understand!? This is a clear act of betrayal, is it not!”

Varius looked at the man before his eyes.

“The first to betray was the

monarchy. Not only my heir, demanding I send his wife and my grandson as well... your family taken hostage, did you think nothing of it!?"

The baron glared at him.

"It's the way of the noble! It's not as if it never happened before! Yet led by feelings for your kin, you've turned coat on your country!"

Varius was unshaken.

"Who in their right mind would pledge devotion to a state without authority. The current Bahnseim does not have worth in serving, is all there is to it. You all have misread the flow of the times."

And one of his men ran over.

“Varius-sama, the search of the mansion has been completed. As prior investigation has shown, he was already surrounded by lovers. There were children, and there doesn’t seem to be a doubt they’re the children of that baron.”

Varius looked down over the baron.

“... Knowing your family wouldn’t come back alive, you prepared another heir for yourself. You sold your family, did you?”

The baron made a bit of a maddened smile.

“And what of it? Passing down our blood is our obligation. I knew the people taken as hostages wouldn’t be safe. But... what of it!? If it’s for

the peace of the house, I'll cut them off even if family they be. That's the way of the nobles"

Varius recalled the faces of his son, and his daughter-in-law and grandchild.

"Hmm. But your baron house ends here. I'll say you died in battle with honor. If your family is still alive, we'll look after them. I have nothing but pity for the family you discarded."

As the baron was carried off, Varius covered his face with his left hand.

"Varius-sama."

One of his subordinates showed worry, so Varius spoke.

“... Even when all he said was correct, here I am worrying for the safety of my son. It’s nothing more than a faint hope, but if he is still alive... no, I’m scared to find out. What state my son is in.”

His subordinate knight looked down as well.

Celes the terrible. A woman who’d calmly lay hands on even those who adored her.

Varius spoke to his men.

“For now, we’ll move on. If we’re late to meet up, there’s a possibility that will be used as a reason to reduce our territory. Let’s hurry to suppress our next target.”

As the man left the room, his

subordinates abided by his orders...

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... The South.

After Djanpear provoked Bahnseim, it immediately fled into the mountains and tempted them to follow.

They made it look as if they could only fight on their specialized battlefield. The surrounding countries had moved, and now that they knew they were being attacked from all four directions, Bahnseim's side was showing something close to impatience.

They likely wanted to defeat Djanpear at once to offer relief to the other fronts.

“We’re being made light of.”

Djanpear’s king Jules had a white cloth draped over the shoulder of his armor, that continued to wrap around his waist. It was adorned with gold, and stood out considerably.

“Your majesty, are we simply to keep attracting the southern soldiers in like this?”

“That’s the plan. They have the advantage on flat land. Well, I do plan to attack if they show their backs, but... the enemy may crumble before they get the

chance."

The feudal nobles of the south, upon hearing of the continent's movements, were quite compelled to consider an occupational change.

And in truth, even if they fought, Jules could see Bahnseim losing its motivation. He touched a hand to his chin.

"Now then, around how far has our favorite little leader gotten?"

As Jules said that, the Valkyrie nearby answered.

"The area under the capital's direct control is already before his eyes. He is in the middle of exchanging blows with the final feudal lord on his path."

Jules, upon hearing that.

“The east already lost before, and he absorbed in their soldiers. They can’t put up any resistancy resistance, huh. In that case, we’ve got to properly nail down the southern soldiers.”

He said.

(If possible, I’d like to subdue the southern lords and race to his aid to sell a favor. If I do, that one won’t have trouble finding marriage. I can’t leave her in the country, and she’s nothing but trouble, so I have to somehow push her onto... I mean entrust her to good hands. Ludmilla-dono seemed worried as well, so I’ve got to make a move myself.)

Jules thought over how to force his problematic half-sister onto the leader as he thought over his next plan...

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... An army of approximately a hundred and ninety thousand stood before the area under direct royal control, surrounding the city of the last feudal lord.

It was Lyle's main force, but for now it wasn't showing any movement.

From the pleasant advance they had experienced to that point, out of

breath... they were not. They took some rest as they carried negotiations with the other parties.

The ones charged with it were Baldoir and Maksim.

An envoy from the count had come, sweating with an indescribable expression as he explained the present situation.

Within the tent, the envoy stood before the two as he looked as if he were desperately giving an excuse.

“W-we’re quite confused, and we’ve no idea what happened... i-it’s true we were pointing our spears your way, but blue beads of light suddenly started falling and we regained our sanity, or how should I

put it…”

Before Lyle left.

He had undone Celes’ charm on the area. For that sake, the belligerent Count House had suddenly grown half-hearted.

Baldoir spoke with sympathy for his plight.

“Why not take some time to calm down? We can’t carry out any decent negotiations when you’re in such a state. I recommend you return and get your feelings in order.”

The envoy addressed him.

“H-however! There’s no way we can calm down with such a great army

before us. Voices of anxiety are already raising from within...”

Maksim crossed his arms.

“That’s your circumstance, and no business of us. Once your internal administration has calmed down, get your policies in order and we can start up negotiation once more. Well, we need to establish a definite period. For now, come again after a week’s gone by.”

Seeing the envoy’s shoulders dropped, it hurt their hearts. Once they had sent him back, the two men breathed out their sighs. Baldoir wiped his sweat.

“With this, we can buy some time and get off without having to work

towards public order.”

Maksim shared his sentiment.

“If we rush in at once, it will be a pain to manage. And we can’t advance while Lyle-dono isn’t here. It would be troublesome if the soldiers ran amok inside the city.”

The two of them were doing what they could to conceal Lyle’s absence, sending back the messenger and earning some time.

Baldoir raised his face.

“... We’ve somehow made it possible for Lyle-sama’s return.”

He said quite sorrowfully...

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In the ancestors' memories within the Jewel, I had seen the mansion a number of times.

But seeing it in reality brought out yet another emotion.

"The details have changed here and there. I guess time flows for mansions as well."

There was a stone statue in the center of the fountain just beyond the gate. But the statue's shape was different to the one I had seen in the Jewel.

Novem to my side spoke without a change in expression.

“... It was destroyed when Maizel-sama and Claire-sama were having a lover’s tiff. They did piece it back together, but Maizel-sama said he had grown tired of it.”

A lover’s tiff... it does seem my father had a Walt House-esque side to him as well.

Looking around, I could see the servants collapsing at the knees, covering their faces with their hands. Those that had taken up their weapons in an attempt to sever their own lives were surrounded and suppressed by the knights we’d brought along.

I had come to the Walt House in the country’s south west.

We had infiltrated in small numbers, but through the guidance of the Walt House knights and soldiers we'd brought along, we got in quite easily.

And from there, I used the Jewel to dispel Celes' curse.

Aria and Miranda came up to me.

"Lyle, we've brought him over."

"The Walt House's stewards sure are extreme. He'd already begun writing a will, you know. Should I say he's quick to recover, or impulsive."

I stood before the steward of the mansion.

"... What happened to old man

Zell's hut?"

The steward kept his head down.

"My deepest apologies, young master... My deepest..."

Shannon behind me pulled on my clothes.

"Lyle, now's no good. It seems he's really in despair. Let him have some rest."

Thinking she was exactly right, I spoke up.

"I give no permission for suicide. That's an order. And I've no particular intent to punish. I'll station guards, but you should rest a while for the day."

As I walked off, Eva and May looked over the mansion.

“Doesn’t really give the liberated feeling. It’s just really sad, or rather, it feels as if we’ve done a bad thing.”

“More importantly, I’m more worried about that one. Look, he’s coming!”

The one charging at us was a single knight. The structure of his face could be classified as beautiful; a baby-faced knight one might think of as cute.

“Get out of here! Washout of the Walt House!!”

With a bloodcurdling expression, he pulled the sword at his waist and

cut at me. The guard knight who hurriedly leapt out was cut, and Eva and May leapt out before me.

I nudged them aside, and pulled the Katana at my waist. The rare metal Katana that had finally been successfully tempered let off a pale light.

As I cut with the momentum built up as I pulled it from its sheath, I cut through the knight, sword and all.

As I wiped off the blood on the blade, I looked at my foe.

“I don’t recognize him.”

One of the mansion’s knight let out a weak voice.

“... H-he was Celes-sama’s favorite knight. Ever since Celes-sama left for the capital, he was left aside. He spent every day mumbling to himself.”

He had likely sworn loyalty to Celes from the depths of his heart. Not under her curse, a true pledge of faith.

“So there are those sort as well. Understood. Treat the guard knight. And collect all their weapons. If they oppose, I mind it not if you retaliate.”

As I issued orders, I headed for the place I had accepted the Jewel.

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“... Zell, I’m back. I’m sorry. I... didn’t make it in time.”

Where not even the burn marks remained, the lot the hut once stood was the only place the grass didn’t grow.

It was here that I once received the Jewel.

If old man Zell wasn’t there, I’m sure I wouldn’t be here now.

Eva approached us.

“Lyle, I’ve brought them. Zell-san’s family.”

Turning, I looked at Zell’s family. His grandson had grown, while his

son and daughter were in good years. I could even see a great grandchild. I gave a simple explanation and offered my thanks to the family.

Right after that, Gracia returned. It seems she had bought what I'd asked her to.

"This is all I could get. Well, given the season perhaps it can't be helped."

Taking the bouquet of flower, I placed it where the hut once stood.

Elza looked around.

"It really was in quite the hidden place."

Clara looked at me.

“So you wanted to show it to us? Is that how it is?”

I shook my head at her and denied it.

“That’s not it. I wanted to show it to him. That I’m alright. Truth be told, I wanted to become a first-rate adventurer and repay the favor. But I didn’t make it in time…”

Monica didn’t use her usual joking tone.

“So he’s your life’s savior? Then he is our savior as well. I’m surprised he managed to maintain his mind and live in this mansion of madness. I’m sure he went through much pain.”

There, old Zell’s son spoke.

“When the adventurers’ guild betrayed and ran amok within the territory, my father was injured. I heard it was right before he was to rise from a soldier to a knight. The house’s head was absent, and it seems he fought to protect it no matter what, but... he was unable to answer the head’s expectations, and it seems he regretted for the rest of his days.”

I never knew old Zell had such a past.

But I knew why the Seventh kept him by his side.

“No, my grandfather was thankful of old Zell. His expectations were more than answered. And I owe your father my life. If anything

troubles you, say it to me. I'll at least protect his family for him."

The son shook his head.

"Those words would have been enough for my father. And we have a house and some assets. The previous generation's head was quite kind to us."

I thought over the Seventh's mindfulness.

"I see. Then if anything happens, come over."

Saying that, I turned to where the hut used to be once more.

In a small voice.

"... I wasn't able to become a first-

rate adventurer, but I hope you'll forgive me for that."

Chapter 318: Brides of the Walt House.

Waking up in the mansion of the Walt House, I looked over my own room.

The room I had once been confined had been home to mountains of books. Right, that they were once there was a fact, but now there were none.

Once I was driven out of the house, it seems all my belongings were disposed of. There was a bed, and the bookshelf that occupied one of the room's walls was empty.

I reached my hand from the Jewel

hung at my neck, and gripped it tight.

According to Baldoir, the Walt house still had reserve forces. To prevent an attack from behind while we were busy with Celes, he recommended I head here first.

His true intent was likely to give me a trip back home. We used Porter to move through the surrounding territories, utilizing the Jewel's new ability... a something similar to my father's Skill to dispel Celes' charm as we went around.

But it's not as if all would rejoice on their release.

I felt quite conflicted as well.

As I thought, a knock came from

the door.

“Chicken dickwad, people are gathering from the surrounding territories one after the next.”

Rising up off the bed, I asked Monica for a report on the situation.

“The surrounding territories, eh? What about the mansion?”

Monica shrugged her shoulders.

“There are many trying to kill themselves. And we’ve received reports that some of their families outside the mansion have killed themselves as well. They’ve sent in testaments of how they wished to atone for their son or daughter’s malpractices.”

She reported it all without hiding a thing. But that was how it should be.

“Tell them once more that I give no permission for suicide. That I’ve no particular punishment in mind. They were only being manipulated by Celes’ ability.”

The treatment they had offered me... there were some who tried to end it with that in mind. And that was a surprise to me.

I hated how release wasn’t a safe end to it.

Monica looked over at me.

“I talked with Miranda-san as well, but are you sure it wouldn’t be better to just punish them? You’ll

be able to prevent those who choose rash action driven by their thoughts of self-condemnation."

I heard out her opinion.

"... This really is a pain."

I had returned, but I couldn't find any soothing for my heart. The mansion that had once welcomed me so warmly, even when I released Celes' curse, it didn't look like it would ever return.

Looking at reality like this, I realized just how many people there were with apologetic sentiment. But at this point, I had yet to find anyone glad.

"Perhaps my return wasn't for the best."

There, Monica looked at me, clapping her hands together twice.

“So what shall we do with the people who’ve dropped by?”

I covered my face with my right hand.

“I can’t just go about not meeting them. Though I’d like to go off to Baldoir’s hometown as well.”

Thinking of how busy it was even if I’d returned, I took a coat in hand, and draped it over myself before leaving the room.

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... Shannon took a walk through the Walt House mansion.

It was a vast estate. To add to that, there were so many children in the Fifth's time that a second annex mansion for child-use had been constructed. After that, it had been used whenever guests were invited.

Walking through the annex, Shannon listened to the words of Elza walking behind her.

"... It's somewhat more extravagant than our palace back home."

Shannon recalled what she had heard from Miranda.

"It seems the Walt House has the most territory in Bahnseim. It's bigger than some countries, so I

guess there was no helping it? Ah, there it is."

Shannon arrived at a certain room she had set as her walk's destination.

It was a room of the annex that was never opened for guest use, and a room the previous generation's House Head Brod had kept as it was.

Shannon held up the key, and once she opened the door, she saw the guns lining the walls.

It was the room Milleia used.

One shot guns, which would require a new shell loaded after every shot. What's more, there were knives fastened to the gun barrels. There

were a number of them around, but as none had been looked after as of late, they were coated in rust.

Elza looked at them.

“So many copies of the same gun. But it doesn’t look like any of them are usable.”

From among them, Shannon looked for one in good condition. She searched and took it in hand.

“Yeah~, you think I should take this one home with me? It’s a precious memento, and it’s my great grandmother’s, so it’s practically mine.”

Elza turned to Shannon.

“Oh, so you’re related?”

Shannon lifted up the heavy gun.

“My great grandmother was from the Walt House. The Circry House still had relations to the Walts up to the previous generation, it seems.”

Elza nodded in understanding.

“I think I’ll take it back and have it fixed up. I don’t think it’s bad to have at least one of them around.”

As Shannon said that, she continued to look around the room with Elza. There was dust piled up, and it seemed evident it hadn’t been cleaned for a number of years.

She had tried asking one of the mansion’s personnel. It seemed that Maizel had decided to stop preserving it and planned to turn it

into a guest room in his generation. But they had enough rooms, so there was no need to hurry to convert it, and before it had come to anyone's attention, it had simply become a room that no one would enter.

Shannon looked at the room.

"It's as if it's been forgotten; a lonely room."

She said...

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Porter's loading tray.

Sitting on the bench, I talked to Miranda sitting beside me. Novem was sitting furthest away, out of pleasant conversational range.

It was clear from anyone's eyes that she was avoiding me. But it wasn't as if she didn't listen to what I had to say.

Whatever the case, a sense of distance the word dubious was insufficient to describe had formed between us.

"Lyle, are you listening?"

"Eh, oh... I was not listening."

When I gave an honest apology, Miranda breathed a sigh. Sitting on the bench, she changed over her crossed legs and folded her hands

on her lap.

“I was asked quite a few things over there, and one of them was whether the legal wife’s been decided among us. What’s more, they said something about the Walt House’s precepts and such. I’d heard about them before, but were those precepts seriously preserved?”

The Walt House precepts were a lie the First had spouted through his drink. They were carried down generation after generation, and remained as our precepts.

“... I was still a child when I heard of them, so I couldn’t quite tell how seriously people were taking them. Anyways, it’s all about having a talented person as a bride, right?

Rather, don't you think those precepts are unnecessary at this... erk!?"

As we were talking, Novem's gaze pierced into me. Hearing I was going to discard the precepts our founder left behind, she seemed extremely sorrowful.

Miranda did appear to notice, but she purposely pretended not to.

"I doubt it does you any harm to keep them. I mean, I clear them, so does it really matter?"

Miranda looked up at me as if to peer in.

"Y-yeah. Probably."

There, Aria sitting in front of us

looked at Miranda.

“One of the mansion people said they were relieved as long as Novem gave the permission. Then I doubt we have any that don’t clear them.”

It’s true that a majority of the members here had received Novem’s passing grade. The only one she ever gave a strong denial to was Lorphys’ royal princess.

Shannon was playing cat’s cradle with Elza. And Gracia was staring at them absentmindedly.

Winning out against Elza, Shannon made a triumphant pose before turning to me.

“Come to think of it, there’s

something I'm curious about."

"What is it?"

"What sort of people were the Walt House's wives? See, when it comes to its heads, you told it all to Eva, so I hear it from her all the time, but I haven't the slightest idea what sort of people the Walt House's women were."

When she asked me once more, I conceded there really were a lot of ambiguous points. At times harsh, at times gentle, I had seen their figures in the Jewel.

But I didn't know the specifics on the ancestors' wives... the Walt House women.

Eva's interest was piqued, so she

leaned forward.

“I want to hear it to. If the precepts were to welcome in talented women, then that means they were all prodigious ones, right?”

I folded my arms as I thought.

“That’s probably right.”

Shannon looked over Porter’s loading tray. May was on the ceiling. Clara was controlling Porter, so she wasn’t here. Monica knit as she spoke.

“Whoever they may be, as long as they can birth chicks, they are no different to us.”

... She was the same as always. Shannon looked at the members

gathered in Porter.

“But there’s no way they were stranger than these members, right?”

There, Miranda looked around as well.

“Right. This may be the first since the start of the Walt House.”

She said and laughed. Everyone gave a, ‘quite right,’ as they laughed. But there was something I could feel from the air.

... Not a single one of them thought themselves to be the strange one. They were certain they were different...

...

But when I looked at Novem, she averted her eyes from me. No, rather from me, it felt as if she was having difficulty saying something.

“Novem, don’t you know a bit about it? ... I mean, I’m sure there’re a few tidbits that’ve been passed down through the Forxuz House as well.”

When I sent over an ill-natured voice, Novem seemed panicked. She couldn’t just tell everyone she carried down the memories of an evil god. But if I asked like this, I doubt it would be too suspicious.

For some reason, Novem’s gaze was swimming around more than usual.

Seeing her like that, Eva thought something was up.

“Do you know an interesting story? There were plenty of them with the Walt House heads, so I’m sure their wives had their share as well. Or could it be they were dragged all over by their husbands or something?”

Perhaps everyone wanted to hear, as their eyes were full of expectations. Novem did try to evade it, but that wasn’t working out.

“I-I’m none too knowledgeable on the matter. And I heard the missus were all worthy of the Walt House precepts that promised to welcome in talented individuals. So let’s not let that trend end in Lyle-sama’s generation…”

Shannon grinned.

“Novem’s flustered. She definitely knows something.”

While Shannon had her share of hopeless points, the girl could read human emotions. Hearing that, Miranda sounded intrigued.

“How sneaky for you to keep everyone else in the dark. Out with it.”

Monica alone seemed uninterested as she knit.

“Fufu, with this, even if the chicks are born in dozens, we won’t be troubled with clothing. And no matter how you look at it, there will be several to several dozen born every year. There will be no end to

serving them."

As she swiftly continued to produce baby clothes, Monica was drooling.

I guess she wouldn't be shaken no matter what happened.

Porter suddenly stopped.

As everyone's stance crumbled, Novem was the first to cry out.

"Did something happen, Clara-san!?"

This lass is running away, or so spoke the eyes she ignored as she called for Clara. So Clara came down from the driver's seat.

"No, there was a person in pain. There was, but..."

It seems the gist wasn't getting across.

Opening the door to the loading tray, I saw May was taking a stance before the injured one. They person rolling along the ground in pain... half of their face had swelled, and their right hand showed a bizarre expansion.

While they were definitely in pain, it was an ominous sight.

"Urrrgggggggrrrrrrrruuuuuu!! L-Lyyllleeee....!! Keeellllll!!"

It was almost like the growl of a beast. As I pulled the Katana at my waist, my comrades who'd descended gripped their weapons in hand. For the behavior of the other

party was clearly bizarre.

And as she popped her face out the door, Shannon cried out.

“Eh? What’s with him… on top of being dead, there’s a monster latched… coming from inside of him.”

What I recalled was the scene of Breid using that drug to take on a monster-like appearance.

The flesh of the man’s form expanded, sprouting hair from there to a point where I could no longer call that figure human.

From the nearby woods, I could hear similar ominous growls.

As I looked around, I used a Skill.

There were a number of points directing clear hostility towards us. But they hadn't been there just a moment before. They had suddenly sprung up.

"... Come to think of it, there weren't any responses in the direction we were headed."

Where did a collapsed human being come from? There were people my Skill couldn't capture, but a majority of them were hiding with a Skill themselves.

I couldn't think there were enough of those sorts around to surround us like this.

The knight surrounded the man who'd become monster.

“Stand back, Lyle-sama!”

The man suddenly leapt in our direction and collapsed again. Once he had completely become a monster, it looked as if he was a fusion of man and beast.

Monica looked at the enemy and muttered.

“Rather than a monster, he looks like he’s come straight out of a tokusatsu. But if he’s an enemy of my master, I shall eliminate him.”

As the surrounding knights tried to plunge in their weapons, the monster leapt up. It casually rose several tens of meters in the air, and in a similar fashion- leaping from the forest- other monsters

began falling towards me.

Regripping the hilt, I was about to intercept them when a single woman whirled into the air.

“Novem.”

As she swung the heirloom staff she carried regularly, it took on the form of a large scythe to shred up the monsters. And landing on the ground, she was followed by a downpour of blood on all of us.

“Novem, you’re...”

I reached out my hand, but stopped it halfway. As she raised her face, her eyes were more muddled than I had ever seen them before.

Novem muttered. While looked at

my hand lingering in the air.

“... You don’t have to push yourself, Lyle-sama. Even I understand that I’m creepy. But I merely couldn’t’ permit something like this to happen. I’ll be more careful next time.”

Saying that, Novem was smiling, yet I found it strangely scary. Her eyes muddled, and with that unnerving smile, her face soaked red in blood.

I was unable to call out to her.

Chapter 319: Cute Celes, Lovable Lyle

Attacked by the men who had become beast, we lined their dead bodies by the side of the road.

Unable to leave them be, it was determined we were to incinerate them. We couldn't conduct a detailed investigation here. We didn't have the time to take a detour.

Beside the soldiers digging holes in the ground, I called Shannon and May to confirm the corpses. They all had their heads severed from their bodies, having been taken out in a single strike.

In that one swipe of Novem's staff turned scythe, these monsters somewhere in-between man and beast had perished.

May looked at the corpses.

"... I feel something unpleasant. An ominous feeling. I couldn't feel their presences either, but they were moving, sure enough."

As she crossed her arms in thought, it seems May hadn't sensed them either. But after Shannon looked at the bodies, she covered her eyes with the palms of her hands.

"They weren't living to begin with. And something from within them swelled up to become something else entirely. It's really unpleasant."

Both May and Shannon felt unpleasant. And Shannon said they weren't alive from the start.

I watched over the bodies that didn't seem as if they'd revert to normal.

"They were purposely placed to attack."

Perhaps it was Celes' message. Not to I- who'd begun my invasion. I'm sure... it was a message to Novem, or so I had a vague inkling.

Novem's disconcertment she showed as she took the lead, and her usual level-headedness was nowhere to be found. This held a meaning to Novem... and perhaps it's nuance was a declaration of

war.

In truth...

“Novem, what do you think about all this?”

Novem, who’d been looked down over the bodies from the side, blankly turned towards me. It didn’t look as if she’d heard May or Shannon’s words.

“... Yes, I believe it is just as you’ve said. There’s no way anyone would think they could take us with such numbers. Then we should think they must have been purposely made to attack.”

I touched a hand to my chin, letting my thoughts circle around.

“It’s Celes’ doing, so I’ve no idea how much meaning It holds. It may be a simple provocation, or something she thought up on a whim.”

Even if there was no meaning it all, trying it because it looked fun was how Celes did things.

I also considered such action had come out as a specific warning to us.

There, Eva returned with the robed dark elves from the forest.

“Lyle, there weren’t any strange points around. Too little of anything, mind you. With so many numbers, it’s plain uncanny there were no traces of them waiting on

standby. Though they could have just come with good timing."

If they were staying in the forest, at the very least, there would be some minute trace of them doing so. Where they rested. Thinking of the season, lighting a fire would be a necessity. And food stock would be needed as well. Excretion was unavoidable.

Hearing there was no sign of anything, I looked towards Shannon and May.

"So the pragmatic conclusion is that they really weren't alive. It does seem Celes has left humanity."

All my bad premonitions were hitting the mark, and as things were

going, perhaps it was only a matter of time before Celes was taken over by Agrissa.

And it seems she had laid hands on the drug to turn man to monster, and completed it. It felt almost as if she was showing off the fact of its completion.

"... We'll bury them once we've burned them. If we didn't have a need to hurry on, I'd have liked to conduct a more-detailed investigation."

I took a glance at Novem.

The one who requested an incineration and burial was Novem. If the one who knew something about this chose it, that was

without a doubt the proper means of disposal.

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… Bahnseim's capital of Centralle.

"Hah, I'm getting bored. Building father's grave and burying a few ten thousands alive was fun, but…"

In the audience chamber she sat on the throne, sticking her elbow into the armrest, and resting her chin on her hand. While she showed a slovenly bearing, those lined to watch her form were entranced.

For now she was bored, so she lined up the ministers from early in the morning creating an air as if she was to start up a ceremony or something.

But at some point along the way she had lost interest.

“I thought I’d give whatever random order was on my mind, but that’s boring. I’ve grown tired of the knights fighting to the death, and those without the willpower to stand up to torture merely rejoice, so it’s no fun at all.”

Her own... a power close to Septem’s ability, a something that entranced humans.

By it, there were many humans who

earnestly believed it just to be killed by Celes. And in all actuality, when she tried to torture, their pain would always turn to delight in the end.

The stronger Celes' power grew by the day, the stronger that trend became. Even if she paid no mind to it, those around would depend on her. They would revere her.

But Celes didn't have the slightest mind to try suppressing that power.

From the Jewel of the staff in her hands, she could hear Agrissa's voice.

「So you've already cultivated so much of Septem's power in your body? You're as wonderful as I

thought, Celes. Even I hadn't grown so far when I was your age.』

Without paying mind to the people around her, Celes answered her. From the eyes of those around, it was as if she was talking to herself, but no one would ever find that strange.

What Celes was doing was the right thing. No matter what life was irrationally taken, if Celes did it, it was their justice.

"When the power gets stronger, it all grows boring. Is that why you thought up all those ideas?"

Agrissa, whose atrocities were well known, gave a simmering cackle. No matter how rudely Celes

addressed her, she wouldn't grow angry. If it was anyone else, she would show them hell on earth.

『Boredom is poison to me as well. And I hate the thing called enduring. Time spent waiting for those human to grow in numbers is wasted time. But I hated going at it small-scale... come to think of it.』

Agrissa within the Jewel let her pretty mouth twist. Beautiful as it was, she ominously spread it into a crescent moon, and laughed as she spoke.

『That time was fun. Adorable Celes, when your ancestors stood against me. The Novem of the time was supporting from behind, or perhaps she was the ringleader of it

all, but they opposed me and challenged me to battle. As I basked in my boredom, it was the best time on earth.♫

But in contrast to Agrissa, Celes grew sullen. A wrinkle graced her brow, as she clenched her molars.

“That insect. That damn twat... that trash with nothing to him but Novem’s affection, just the very fact he stands against me is irritating. I could grant him every pain in the world, and it wouldn’t be enough. I could kill him and kill him again and again and I wouldn’t be satisfied. Simply by remaining alive does he ruin the taste of the air I breathe. The very fact he exists irritates me. Hey, when is it that I can finally kill him?”

As Celes grew expressionless and monotone towards the end, Agrissa laughed.

『Hey, there's someone out there who can draw out so much emotion from you. Just killing them wouldn't be any fun. At the start, I did hate that man. But the one to draw so much of my attention... adorable Celes, your ancestor Lyle was the first.』

Hearing that, Celes lifted her staff high, and swing it down. The throne's right armrest went flying, and even the stone floor was shattered.

"... I'm giving him my attention? Well yeah, I am. But unlike you, I won't call it love or affection.

Nothing but my revulsion wells up towards that thing. Just how much pain was it for me that that thing existed?"

Agrissa seemed to enjoy watching Celes' reactions.

『You'll never change, will you. But that's what's lovely. Now then, while we're at it... this modern day Lyle has challenged you to a fight. Why don't you prepare to receive him?』

There, a slight irritation flashed across Celes' face.

"... Are you sure it's alright to provoke Novem? Even when you've told me to this point to never lay hands on her?"

Agrissa's face turned serious in the Jewel.

『Yeah, it's fine. It's something like fate. And as you are now, you're more than capable of opposing Novem. You've no need to be modest as you were when you negotiated with her. You hated that, right? Scampering off in fear whenever she came to the mansion? The reason I told you not to kill him was because he was in Novem's hands. And you would have soiled yourself had Novem learned of it.』

Riled up by Agrissa, Celes crushed the remaining armrest with her left hand.

From the eyes of those around, it

would only look as it Celes had suddenly flown into ill humor.

“I was scared? Don’t fuck with me. I only didn’t do it because you told me not to! I’m afraid? That’s rich. Do you understand your own position here? You’ve nothing but a mouth to speak.”

Agrissa grinned within the Jewel.

『Don’t be so angry, my cute Celes. And I’m saying that you can win now. If it’s now, you can even win against Novem.』

Celes rose and wrung out her voice.

“Henceforth, all troops are to prepare to intercept enemy forces at Centralle! Listen well, kill them all without letting a single rat

survive. I'm going to sleep."

Saying she would sleep so early in the morning, Celes left the audience chamber. The crown prince Rufus raced after her from behind. Boasting curling red hair, once he'd left the chamber with Celes, he spoke as guards surrounded the two.

"Celes, you've not let me sleep alongside you at all these days. We're husband and wife, so why not dote on me a bit?"

Looking at the young man begging to be pampered, Celes was irritated. To Celes, Rufus was an unnecessary existence.

But there was only one point where

Rufus held value. Not his position as a crown prince. To the current Celes, the royal house and royal line held no meaning at all.

But his presence pissed Agrissa off. While always teasing and riling Celes, Agrissa hated Rufus... the Bahnseim royal line. So Celes left him be. And she didn't lay hands on the Bahnseim House. They were all still alive.

"Today I'm going to sleep between my mother and father. If I get in the mood come the fall of night, I'll keep you company."

But Rufus hung on.

"Please wait, Celes. I don't care who you sleep with. That's just how

wonderful of a person you are. But I am your husband. Just a little is enough. A little is enough, so…"

Seeing how far the prince who was once so popular with the people had fallen, Celes' mood improved just a bit.

In contrast, Agrissa was put in an ill humor.

"You're right. I'll consider it some. Have some expectations for tonight."

As Celes walked off, Rufus was delighted. Saying he was going off to start preparing now, he headed for his bedroom.

Agrissa turned to Celes.

『You keep a man of Bahnseim as a pet? I'm sure I told you to kill him already.』

Hearing that voice, Celes smiled.

"If I've given him nothing but expectation, it's no burden on me. And if it irritates you so, are you sure you've not fallen for Rufus yourself?"

On Celes' comeback, Agrissa pouted more as she smiled.

『Splendid, cute Celes. You've gotten able to say it. But eventually...』

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Meeting up with the main force, I received a report from Baldoir.

In a room of the moving fortress, I read through the document as I conversed with him.

“Perhaps your trip home was an unnecessary action. It was a decision I made on my own, but as it seems to have increased the burden you bear, you have my deepest apologies.”

As he apologized, I spoke disinterestedly.

“In the case the Walt House soldiers ignored our defenses and

attacked from the rear, it would have increased our casualties. There was plenty of meaning to it. Don't apologize."

But I had decided a certain something in my heart.

"However, I may never return there. There are too many who feel burdened by my presence alone."

As a practical problem, the Walt House territory was unsuited as a stronghold to govern the continent. If some work was put into it, rule would be possible, but that would take time.

Thinking on a continental scale, the site condition was poor.

Perhaps Baldoir understood that.

“Then will you set up your next base in Centralle?”

Centralle definitely did have a lot of the conditions together. The Sentras Kingdom that unified the continent before Bahnseim had its capital there as well.

Having finished the report, I took a stretch.

“To be quite honest, I’m doubtful. Monica’s said quite an interesting thing, so perhaps it’s a good idea to take up her proposal.”

“Monica-dono? She hasn’t said anything too exorbitant, has she?”

As Baldoir looked anxious, I sent a smile.

“If I’m going to be making my own country, I should make a new capital, is all she said. Well, it isn’t bad. Thinking of the post-war period, that may be faster than restoring the ruins.”

Rising to my feet, I opened the room’s window. I could see the spectacle of the numerous tents pitched up around.

The allied forces were arriving in droves, and a force exceeding six hundred thousand had gathered.

Baldoir looked in my direction.

“A new capital, is it? It’s true that seems easiest. If the reports are to be believed, there will be some resistance to settling in Centralle.”

Rauno's report after reaching Dalien had hit my expectations. The dead had come back, or perhaps were being controlled by the current Celes.

Centralle had become a city of the dead.

Chapter 320: The Winning Horse

... A village a little ways from the main road was astir from early in the morning.

The adults holed themselves in their homes with their farming tools, praying that nothing would happen.

The scene a young boy who'd taken flight from the village witnessed wasn't that of any army he'd ever seen before.

"What the hell's that..."

It was as if a fortress was moving.

Around it the soldiers preceded without rest in the direction of Centralle, the cool morning air a little different than usual.

His mouth held open at the sight of the great army he'd never seen before, the boy looked up at the blue haired man standing atop the fortress. Atop the ramparts fluttered white flag with a blue circle in its center. Around the circle sprawled ornaments of gray, and it was obvious it was the flag under which the army marched.

But he had never seen that flag before.

Until his family came to drag him back into the house, the boy watched the sight in awe...

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Looking over the soldiers proceeding down the road, I felt the cool morning air on my Skin.

“The air’s no good. When the soil’s dry the dust clouds are terrible. But even so, when it rains it robs our stamina away.”

Looking around from the roof of the fortress, I could see white smoke rising from nearby. It did seem there was some village around somewhere.

We had entered the area under the Bahnseim House’s direct control,

and continued on with our march. There was no resistance you could call resistance, and there weren't any signs of forces leaving Centralle.

Invaded by surrounding countries, there was no way they wouldn't be able to gather the troops. It was more than clear we were trying to tempt the capital.

But even so, in order to fight Celes, we'd have to aim for the city regardless.

To the roof rose Vera in an overcoat.

"Is it really alright for our leader to go out without any guards?"

As she said that and stepped onto

the roof, the wind blew to shake her black hair. Her angel wings flowed in the breeze. Containing them in her hands, she looked towards the smokestacks visible from the roof.

Watching the white smoke rise from the chimneys, she nodded a few times before turning her face to face me.

“I heard the others were heading for Centralle as well. There’s no doubt that’ll be the site of the decisive battle, right? They won’t try to take us out one by one?”

In regards to her worry, I shook my head.

“That’s not going to happen. I’ve considered the possibility they’d

leave Centralle open to target one of our forces. It's unthinkable they'd leave themselves short-staffed for defense, and if it's Celes, she'll make Centralle the battlefield."

"It doesn't seem you're saying that because you understand your sister's personalities."

Observing that my expression wasn't the best, Vera hit me with her honest impression. So with a slight laugh I explained it to her.

"She'll definitely sit and wait. Based on how she went about it, she could send dead men in the truest sense of the term to aim for one of our crucial points, but she won't do it because that's a pain."

Rather than a pain, the current Celes didn't give a damn about winning or losing. As long as she could live a life of luxury, she didn't care how many of those below her died off.

No, she would even watch it and laugh.

"You can win, right?"

On Vera's question, I looked straight ahead.

"We'll win the war. There's no doubt about it. We've made enough preparations for that. And with the armies we've taken in, we've gained even more leisure."

There were many feudal lords who'd offered their assistance. On

the other hands, while there were Lords who said they wouldn't cooperate, there were many cases where their populace did join our side.

If it could get them out of the current Centralle... the current Bahnseim they'd help out. Or perhaps they were cooperating with our forces who held the food stock they needed to survive.

"The war, huh? Then what about the most important part?"

She was likely indicating the direct confrontation with Celes. I nodded.

"That's precisely why we've launched this offensive. Sorry, but I've no intent to start a fight even if

I can't win. I decided to march because our current war potential was as complete as we could make it."

That was true.

With Novem at the lead, my comrades who had travelled with me as adventurers. And Gracia, Elza, Ludmilla... our war potential was in order. If it were one on one, the probability of my loss was high, but that just means we won't bring in a one-on-one battle.

"It doesn't matter if she's my sister or a little girl. We'll surround her and beat her down."

Vera showed a shrug of her shoulders.

“That’s the worst line I’ve heard all day, but that’s the safest option. I’m relieved you won’t show your feelings like sibling relations or your pride as a man.”

Vera seemed to approve of my decision. But as an individual, I have to say it was quite a deplorable thing. Because I couldn’t win against my little sister, I was going to be ganging up on her with my numerous girlfriends. That’s practically what I was saying.

“Personally, I’d liked to have been able to solve this on my own.”

To speak to my personal opinion, with my own hands... my hands alone, I wanted to stop Celes. But ability-wise that was impossible.

“If you say something like that and lose, I’ll curse you for the rest of my life. Discarding a winnable battle from personal sentiment is what an idiot does. Well, I don’t hate that sort of thing either.”

But she’d definitely hate it if I was in that position, said Vera.

“If you don’t win there’s no tomorrow, so I won’t forgive it if you go easy. If things are to go on like this, there’s not a single good thing in letting your sister live. I’d feel more if you just ended it in an instant.”

This was likely Vera’s way of encouraging me.

“... That’s my intent. I’ve got

promises to keep."

As I gripped the Jewel, Vera looked between it and me.

"You could hear your ancestors' voices, was it? They're all gone? Come to think of it, I heard them before on the ship."

"Ah, come to think of it, you did hear them."

Thinking back to when she could have heard their voices, I ended up reminiscing.

"I never noticed they were your ancestors' voices. So is it a promise to them?"

There was that too. But the number one was someone else.

“No, to someone like a brother to me? Though I’ve yet to recognize that.”

Letting go of the Jewel, I turned my eyes towards Centralle.

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… Lyle’s army approached the capital.

There were streams of nobles who came to jump aboard the winning horse. Those aiming for their house’s revival. Those who’d taken flight from Centralle.

Those who wanted to be recognized

as nobles.

They came to seek audiences with Lyle. But Lyle fundamentally didn't want any more troops than he already had.

Dressing up simply being there as a favor was quite a difficult thing.

Within all of that, Ralph Circry had come into contact with his daughter Miranda.

Bringing his feet to a tent nearby the moving fortress, he had called Miranda out.

So disembarking the mechanical monstrosity, Miranda took along her guards to enter and greeted her father.

“It’s been a while, Miranda.”

“That’s right. Not since back at the storehouse, perhaps? Back when I was abandoned by a certain someone who bought a Hippogryph having mistaken it for a Gryphon.”

His expression unchanging under the girl’s sarcasm, Ralph thrust straight into his demands.

“I request safe haven for a group of imperial nobles who fled from Centralle. They’ve looked after me, but there are a number of houses among them who’ve looked after you as well. And they have their own troops. If you’ll add them to the lines, they’ll work to their utmost…”

But Miranda rejected the demand with a smile.

“At this point, we’ve no need for any soldiers who can’t put up a decent fight. We’d have our problems even if they were overflowing with battle experience. If there’s a problem with the chain of command, it’ll be the same for my personal unit as well. If you wish to push it through no matter what, I’ll station them as cannon fodder on the front most lines.”

His expression not crumbling under his daughter’s attitude, Ralph made a serious face.

“If you let them assist, there’s merit in it for you. You’re the one without any decent forces protecting your

back. Even if you're the leader's woman, your position is weak. Even if you're to raise a new country of your own, you'll need experienced civil officials. Since they're from Bahnseim, they'll be useful to the leader. He can't call in officials from a foreign land, can he?"

Meaning he would supply civil officials to strengthen Miranda's standing. In all truth, it was Lyle's weak point.

It was an extremely large merit to Miranda. Getting her hands on officials, if she cooperated them, she would become an existence Lyle couldn't ignore.

In Lyle's harem that largely consisted of those specialized to

military might, it would be possible to take a step, even two ahead.

“Well then. That’s quite appealing. But no.”

Miranda still showed her rejection.

“... I thought you were smarter than that. You’ll prioritize your feelings to lose interest?”

Miranda spoke with a smile.

“Feelings? I’m not rejecting it because I hate you. I want civil officials so much I’d bark like a dog for them, and I want to be able to stand against Lianne. We’ll need officials in time to come. But calculating my own interest, I have determined them unnecessary.”

Seeing the slight twitch of Ralph's brown, Miranda could sense that her father was confused.

"You don't quite seem to understand what my interest is. My interest is Lyle's best interest. So will any of this be to Lyle's interest? If backing me were a bunch of officials who'd carry on with Bahnseim's old ways... they'd just be trouble, wouldn't they?"

What Lyle was aiming for was continental rule. For that sake, there were various parts of Bahnseim's methods that wouldn't work out.

And even if Lyle was capable of various things, he was still young. There was a possibility he'd be led

by the nose by the nobles who'd lived their lives as civil officials.

There was no saying there were none who'd fool the papers to fill their pockets. And even if they came out, the fact that they were part of Miranda's faction would make it hard for Lyle to do anything about it. In the worst case, there was a possibility they'd raise problems wherever she wasn't looking.

Those circumstances were the greatest demerit.

"I won't give preferential treatment just because it's my house. In this important period of forming the basis, I don't want to choose my officials based on connections. I

want to go with emphasizing personality and ability."

Even if they were vital managerial positions, filling them with connections would be an extreme demerit to Lyle.

Naturally enough, Ralph was thinking to utilize Miranda's position to hold a large civil officer faction. And Miranda had seen through it.

"If you don't build a stronghold now, you'll be an outcast for the rest of your life."

Hearing Ralph's words, Miranda laughed.

"If that's to Lyle's interest, I'm fine with that."

Ralph glared at her, going into persuasion.

“There are times when problems rise from a lack of knowledge and experience. There’s no way the officials who’ve served the country of Bahnseim over its long history wouldn’t be of use.”

“That’s right. But you see... that country’s falling, isn’t it? You mean to say there’s a reason to religiously carry on that fallen country’s methods?”

“... You despise tradition?”

“I don’t hate it. But I won’t recommend the ones who barge in at the last minute demanding for all the good parts to be handed over.

Well, since we're blood relatives, I'll at least mediate for you a bit. So choose... will you simply be thrown out like this, or will you have the Circry House remain as nobles, for argument's sake."

On Miranda's words, once she thought that he had no more driftwood to cling to, Ralph stood.

"And where are you going?"

To her question, Ralph spoke back.

"You're not the only one. Unreliable as she is, I'll depend on Shannon. If that one's also the leader's woman, I can make a pedestal for her yet. Though she doesn't have your level of talent."

If Miranda was no good, he'd turn

to Shannon. Miranda waved her hand.

“That so, well good luck father.”

She saw him off with a smile.

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“Hah, day after day, why am I the one who has to deal with them? When I’m so busy, they act all posh and ask, how are you today... can’t they tell by looking? Read the mood for goddess’ sake.”

As we grew closer to Centralle, the folks who appeared before our army to curry favor with me

increased. Mercenary brigades approached us as well, and even adventurers gathered.

Perhaps my position as a former adventurer had influenced it, but it seems they intended to emphasize that.

In my room, I draped the cover over myself as I sat on the bed, when Shannon entered the room.

“Hey, it’s dinner time, I’m telling you.”

As I stood I felt the cold on my skin. The mobile fortress had an iron workshop that used fire, so it was much warmer than it would be outside.

But even so I felt cold. I’d stayed too

long in a warm place that my senses were going strange.

“Got it, I’m going now. Wait, what?”

Remembering something, I tried asking Shannon.

“Weren’t you called out today?”

It wasn’t to the same level as me, but there were many who requested meetings with my comrades as well. Even Aria was intruded on by those who’d once taken care of her, or those claiming to be her relatives.

Eva was the same. She wasn’t just the representative of the elves, she was called for as a representative of demi-humans in general.

Clara was mainly called upon from

her scholar associates, and her birthplace of Arumsaas. In most cases, that was what was emphasized.

Within all that, because she had her sister Miranda, Shannon was a rare case where she was never asked for a meeting.

“... Oh, I was told this and that, but I didn’t really get it, so I told him, ‘pass’.”

Quite a fitting response from her.

“Don’t say anything to make them hate you. Try to let them down easily.”

“But that means you’re still refusing in the end.”

“Better than flipping them onto the other side. In the first place, for those that never read the times to this point, there’s no telling what they’re going to do, so it’s contrarily scary. And yet, they needlessly run their mouths... hah, it’s a waste of time. What’s with this racing to our aid. And yet they’ve no food stock of their own? That’s just plain extortion.”

I did understand that meetings were an important thing, but I couldn’t help but let out my complaints. And there really were many who spoke for lengths on things I could care less about.

It’s because they truly believed that helped appeal for their cases that made it so nasty. I could understand

their desperation to jump aboard the winning horse, but...

“I can understand how royalty feels when people come to demand money from them. If we don’t restrict them, these requests are going to become something terrible... what’s wrong?”

Shannon didn’t have her usual energy. While she spoke normally, she looked a little sad or rather, worn out.

“What is there something you don’t like being served today? You’re not getting my dessert.”

As she looked into my face, she made a fed-up expression and shook her head to the side.

“Ignorance is a bliss. In exchange for that bliss, I’ll take your flan.”

“Hold it! Why do you always go for my flan? Stop it. Rather than mine, can’t you aim for someone else’s!?”

There, it seems Shannon seriously grew angry. With a serious expression.

“Hell no! With you it ends up as a joke, but if I go for anyone else’s, it won’t just end with war! I’m not having any of that. No matter how delicious it is, I’m not wagering my life on a flan!”

“And yet my flan’s all good!?”

After we shouted and made a racket, I got the feeling a little more energy had returned to Shannon’s

expression...

Chapter 321: Ties

… In a tent nearby the fortress, Shannon had been called out once more.

Her guard Valkyries stood armored and armed on both sides as she confronted her father Ralph.

“Do you get it, Shannon? This is an important matter. It seems you don’t fully understand it, but our power will definitely–”

Listening to the same contents from yesterday, Shannon cut off Ralph’s explanation part-way.

“… I already told you I don’t get it so I’m passing on it.”

The reason Shannon even kept him company to begin with was because if she refused, her father would try to make contact with Lyle. At present, Lyle was busy as could be with meetings and taking opinions into consideration to fine-tune his strategy, so Shannon thought she would lighten his load a bit.

At the same time, if her elder sister Miranda had already refused, she thought it would all work out if she refused as well.

“You have a large handicap. I’m telling you I’ll do something about it. You are to follow my lead.”

Shannon didn’t really like her father. Her treatment in the house was one thing, but she could tell he

was always looking at her as if eyeing something pitiful.

Shannon's eyes could see Mana. While they couldn't perceive light, she could get a general idea of things through Mana's flow. No, she could see even better than the average-sighted human.

Her father's Mana flow showed a terrible impatience.

Just as Miranda said, the nobles he'd gather together were likely telling him to hurry up with it. In order to keep his standing as their superior, Ralph was desperate. While he was thinking of his daughter, that looked to be quite low on his priority list.

“Even if the leader gets a country in his hands, what will you do if he faces a lack of officials? It isn’t only knowledge. Experience will be necessary. Whether you understand it or not, the ability to do paperwork isn’t everything. The accumulated knowledge and experience one simply can’t pass down is–”

To summarize, it’s impossible for you guys, so appoint us already.

From Shannon’s point of view, wasn’t it a bit late for that? They should have tried to join our side earlier. If Adele or Lianne raising screams of anguish in Beim and Rhuvenns heard his words, they’d click their tongues.

“And I’m telling you, even if you tell

me something like that, I don't get it!"

When Shannon interrupted Ralph with an oblivious act, he slammed his fist onto the table between them.

"Eek!"

While Shannon cowered, it seemed he had decided to go on a strong offense. He would continue in his strong tone until she nodded yes.

"You're no longer in a position where that spoiled attitude will pass! Despite the responsibility you hold, you won't even attempt to hear me out. That's why I'm telling you we'll carry out your support. We'll compensate for your

insufficiencies. And by doing that, you can finally–"

But Shannon didn't keep quiet either.

"But you're only coming over to me because my sister ref... eek!"

As Shannon spoke, Ralph slammed his fist again. He really was desperate. To Shannon, it looked as if he was trying to keep the Circry House alive as he regained its former glory.

But Shannon wasn't the only one in the tent.

"... It looks like that is as far as we can go today. Shannon-san, let us return. We will be using this place for our next meeting, so I shall have

to put in a reservation."

As a Valkyrie said that, Ralph stopped her.

"I'm not done talking. And this is a problem of parent and child!"

There, the two Valkyries spread out the binders on their backs to intimidate him. From them, their weapons came out.

"We have already permitted too many of these meetings under your reason of parent and child. And since it seems you have come under the impression it will prove effective, I will warn you. If you carry on with these threats disguised as negotiations, we shall respond with an adequate attitude."

Hearing that, Ralph made a face as if chewing on something bitter as he left the tent.

Shannon hung her head.

The Valkyries looked at her.

“At the point he came out with that attitude, you should have ordered us to evict him. At the very least, Miranda-san would never have permitted it.”

“Because he will misunderstand that it will be accepted if he uses that strong attitude on another. Well, I’m sure that is just how desperate he is, but... he is not a man suited to negotiations. He is exposing his lack of ability.”

Shannon recalled what Miranda

had told her.

“According to my sister, he acts tough because he was a retainer to the Bahnseim royal line. Even if it’s uncalled for at this point, he already can’t think of his prideful attitude as anything but the norm, and when the situation changes he can’t keep up… so we don’t need him, she said.”

The words of her sister who’d even cut off her own family.

There, the Valkyries folded up their binders as they spoke.

“I have heard the circumstance. But in this case… the first to be abandoned were you sisters. Trying to pick you up again because he

realized there was use in you yet is mistaken."

"He has exposed his shortness in ability and various other things, so his inclusion as a retainer will be rejected. In the worst case, as long as the two of you remain, the Circry House will live on. Its name will still remain in the end. There is no problem at all."

"... You guys aren't saints either."

Looking at the Valkyries, Shannon felt her own load lighten a bit...

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“Even Fidel-san is starting to look like an honest man.”

From a window in a room of the moving fortress, I watched Ralph-san leave the tent as I thought.

Monica was in the room, reporting the situation inside the tent. Similarly, Miranda who’d been curious about that tent situation was here as well.

“I’ve got my doubts about Fidel, but he really is a kind father to his daughters. Though he’s a bit too harsh on others. Regardless, he’s definitely losing here.”

Miranda compared Fidel-san to her own father and shrugged her shoulders.

“... I can at least prepare a side stage for him. You don’t have to hold back, why don’t you help them out?”

When I said that, Miranda shook her head to the side.

“Rejected. If he sees the slightest gap, he’s the type that would even suck out the marrow of the bone. He lived through the muddled affairs of the royal court. It would be troublesome if he brought that knowhow in with him. And we can’t go about carrying on Bahnseim’s ways, can we?”

I had no mind to carry down Bahnseim’s way of rule. Rather, it wasn’t happening. End of story.

“I’ll have to have Adele-san do her best for the time being. She’s doing various things in Beim, and she’s getting in the experience. I’m sure it’ll work out one way or another.”

Monica seemed delighted as she heard that.

“If the individual herself hear that, she’d be so delighted she’s burst into tears and protest. Well, she swore to assist you. It’s only natural she do that much.”

There a knock came at the door. When I granted entry, I found Gracia standing at the doorway.

“The letter from Dalien came in. It seems they’ve turned coat to our side.”

I nodded.

“I see. Well that sounds about right. I was worried because they were so close. And what about that other matter?”

Gracia handed the letter from Rauno to me. Taking it and confirming its contents, it did seem he had succeeded.

“Alright, with this one of our worries has been resolved.”

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... Dalien.

The story backtracks a few days.

A town close to Centralle where Lyle had first become an adventurer.

While it was close, perhaps it didn't stand out much, as it had failed to interest Celes. While it wasn't too big, it was a relatively important town to Centralle.

Having come to such a town, Rauno paid a visit to the one in charge of governing Dalien, a certain Ventra Rodornia.

A large man of tan skin and close-cut red hair had been called there as well.

"When I thought I'd been called forth by the feudal lord..."

The one making a troubled expression was the one who'd once manned the adventurers' guild receptions desk, Hawkins. At this point, he was an executive of the guild.

He had the aptitude from the start, and coming from an adventurer background, he was knowledgeable on adventurers' situations. In Dalien, he had gained enough trust to even serve as the Guild Master's aide.

Rauno laughed at Ventra's side.

"Sorry about that. Well all it means is that our leader's taken a liking to you, does it not? Our leader has evaluated your abilities quite highly."

Hawkins confirmed the contents of the letter before closing his eyes.

“It’s quite moving. The boy who became an adventurer in Dalien, Lyle-kun has... no, now he’s the leader of the alliance, is he? But out of everyone, does it really have to be me?”

The letter detailed that the adventurers’ guild would be placed under state management. At the same time, it stated that Hawkins had been chosen as an executive of that organization.

It was a choice from evaluating ability and character, but Lyle’s own personal evaluation played a large part as well.

Lord Rodornia was making a conflicted expression as well. While he looked like a good-natured lord of small build, one would do best not to be fooled by appearances.

As he was, he was a splendid feudal lord.

“You do have my support for putting the adventurers’ guild under management. But pulling away our valuable personnel will be a painful blow to Dalien.”

Said he as he looked at Rauno. Rauno reached a hand towards a cup of tea withholding an answer.

Hawkins rubbed the corners of his eyes with his fingertips.

“Is it possible for me to reply, I’d

like some time to think?"

Rauno nodded.

"Of course it's possible. Let me just call it a large opportunity. And I'll also put in a request to the guild. For securing magic stones; we'll also buy off the materials we need. Sorry, but our funding has its limits, so I don't think we'll be able to pay for it all satisfactorily."

Lord Rodornia, upon hearing his proposal.

"Accept his request. By our information, the alliance's army exceeds five hundred thousand troops in scale. We should cooperate with them even if we come out at a loss."

Rauno covered his face with his right hand.

“You’re not wrong, but you sure are blunt about it.”

Lord Rodornia laughed.

“Well I’ve got to at least say that much. Because the adventurers’ guild is an independent organization... we can’t quite have them glaring at your leader.”

The adventurers’ guild wasn’t all one organization. It was a system of cooperation to manage the resource of Magic Stones. As it was merely the cooperation of separate organizations, based on the case, it was possible for them to move on their own judgements.

For Dalien's adventurers' guild to go against Lord Rodornia's will and oppose Lyle was by no means an impossible tale.

Of course, there was an executive who understood the situation.

"Of course, we will go into the preparations to cooperate at once. There's no way we could help out Centralle at this point..."

Rauno looked at Hawkins.

"If you're capable of making such a decision, that's a valuable skill. In truth, in a number of territories, the adventurers' guild gathered up mercenaries, and sent them to Centralle as reinforcements. Who knows what they were thinking."

As it was an independent organization, it wasn't as if all Guild's had a capable top. There were many guild who couldn't read the times.

Hawkins seemed knowledgeable about that area.

"... From the point of view of the mercenaries in Bahnseim, there's no profit to be had in joining the allied armies at this point in time. And there's never been a war of this scale ever to this point. They probably think that the Bahnseim side facing a numerical inferiority would pay much better."

If it seems they were to lose, they need only run away.

They just had to get out before the battle even began. There were many untrustworthy bandits among them, said Hawkins.

Hearing of bandits, Lord Rodornia folded his arms.

“... Bandit subjugation. To think that leader who played the idiot noble son would return leading such an army under his belt.”

Rauno touched a hand to his chin, scrubbing it against his unshaven stubble with an amused face.

“Right, he did a bandit subjugation in Dalien. Would you tell me the specifics of the time? While I know he eliminated the bandits, there are quite a few off points in the

specifics.”

To an interested Rauno, Lord Rodornia and Hawkins exchanged looks. And they told him the specifics of how Lyle played the fool...

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In a tent nearby the moving fortress, I found myself surprised.

I never thought I’d meet them here.

“It’s been a while. Clark-san... and Norma-san.”

Captain of the Gryphon

subjugation force, Norma-san. And her vice-captain Clark-san dropped in for a visit. Normally, they wouldn't have gotten a meeting through, but hearing their names I had made the decision to arrange one.

At this point, Clark-san was of a knight house, and had passed the role of head to his son. But this time his son had led the village youths to join the allied army, it seems.

"It's been a while. Belated as it is, I have come to declare our will to participate in this war."

Unlike Bahnseim's east, even if they didn't make their stance clear in the Centralle area, we would consider

taking them in. With the capital of Bahnseim right behind them, they couldn't quite say they'd betray.

It's not like we could come to their rescue, and sending in a request for it would just be unreasonable.

"So for you, Norma-san, it will just be you and a few more taking part?"

While holding a settlement larger than Clark-san's, Norma-san had far fewer participants.

She looked more worn-out than before.

"... If I let my younger brother take part, there's the chance danger would befall him. But even when I voiced my participation, the village heads were reluctant."

Clark-san averted his eyes from Norma-san and spoke to me.

“I did pass what you advised me on to her, but as it was after she entered the territory, there were many things she couldn’t do. It seems her rule isn’t going so well.”

In the past I had conveyed the ancestors’... the Third’s advice to Clark-san. While it seems that was going well, Norma-san was a different story.

She was moved to tears.

“Even the ones I’ve brought along barely have any motivation. Their equipment’s no more than cudgels and sham shields of wood. I have no choice but to ask for help, do I

not?”

She seemed to have her troubles.

“Well, we have some equipment we’ve confiscated, so we can hand over a few from that stock. Thinking to your numbers, the front lines will be a bit too harsh.”

“T-that’s a saving grace. Um, if possible, once this battle is over, you think you could make me an imperial noble...”

On Norma-san’s request, I smiled.

“We’ll have to see. Well, I won’t push you too hard.”

There, Clark-san seemed relieved.

“Thank you. We’ve barely any

who've experienced true war with us, and they've pretty much just tagged along."

There were many small-scale feudal lords hesitant to participate. Even if they came over I was troubled with their deployment, but I would be troubled if I didn't let them show the color of their flags.

If it spread that I took these two in, I'm sure a different reaction would come out. Norma-san lowered her shoulders.

"If I knew you'd rise this high, I'd have flattered you more."

Clark-san sighed.

"I'm honestly impressed by that side of you, former captain. But for

now, I think it best you keep quiet."

Thinking of how they hadn't changed, I gave a bitter smile.

Epilogue

“Hah, the dream I saw last night was the worst. I think I’m going to give up on today’s address. See, I’m sure it was a bad premonition.”

When I said such a thing over breakfast, those around didn’t seem to mind it too much. Monica carrying the food over, and Damien’s automatons seemed somewhat excited as they saw the large portion of the meal that had been eaten away.

“This is what I’m talking about, this! Ah, at this moment we are sparkling brilliantly!”

Born to serve humans, it seems they

were delighted at having fulfilled that duty. Before my eyes, May eating so much meat so early in the morning was...

“That’s my meat!”

But Shannon pinched a portion and ate it.

“Isn’t it fine? I’m still a growing girl!”

I looked at Shannon’s chest as I scoffed. There, an eaten-clean bone hit my face. ‘What are you looking at!?’ said Shannon, so I sent a look of pity at her chest.

“I’m looking at your chest that hasn’t shown any signs of growth at all.”

Miranda munched on toast as she spoke.

“Shannon, quiet down. So what sort of dream was it, Lyle?”

Normally, it was Novem who reacted to me, but the current Novem would only eat and nothing more. Miranda called my name so I raised my face.

I wiped my mouth off with the towel Monica brought over.

“Listen to this, the truth is, last night’s dream was terrible. When I woke up in the morning, there was a naked woman sleeping next to me, and... no, this is all part of the dream okay? Not reality.”

When I said something about a

naked woman, the slightly boisterous mobile fortress dining hall had grown silent. When I properly explained it was a dream, General Blois spoke uninterestedly.

“It’s right before the decisive battle, so when I think of who could be sleeping beside you... we’ll have to carry the bets over to the post-war period.”

Baldoir seemed to feel the same.

“Don’t use Lyle-sama to gamble. But having come so far, to be honest, I’m not sure what to think about you sleeping alone.”

A little down, Maksim-san pierced food with his fork.

“... Can’t you just go for Novem-

dono? And I've already placed a considerable sum on her, so just decide already."

Please don't say it so carelessly. Damien took up the drink put out by one of his automatons.

"Having still yet to decide on a partner, it's quite Lyle-esque, or how should I put it... what's your take on it, old Letarta?"

Old Letarta who'd been eating heartily stuffed his cheeks with meat.

"Can I place my bets too?"

Damien called out an automaton and began relaying the current odds and contenders to the dwarf. I cleared my throat.

"... Anyways, there was a woman so I jumped to my feet. I couldn't see her face, but she was naked so I panicked, and Miranda opened the door."

Miranda looked a little happy.

"Oh my, so you like me so much I come out in your dreams?"

But I instantly.

"... She was holding a knife with a scary look on her face. I cried out, 'I'm still wearing all my clothes, so it's probably a misunderstanding', and ran off. A look in her eyes and I could tell. I was going to be killed at this rate."

There, looking at Miranda's frozen expression, Aria and Gracia covered

their mouthes as they withheld their laughter.

“I-it’s possible. Miranda’d really do it, that girl.”

“Yeah, I can imagine it.”

Muscleheads the both of them, they had much to talk about, and were getting along as of late. Miranda’s eyes was taking them in. But that’s fine for now.

“So when I ran out, it turns out I was inside this fortress. Running down the narrow corridors, I found Elza.”

Elza showed a twitch, but it wasn’t anything too large.

“She was running around looking

for Gracia, so I pointed at Miranda. Yeah, she's scary, so could you hold her off some? I asked."

I felt really sorry for Elza as she gave a crestfallen look, but anyways, I continued on with the dream.

"I ran outside and see, there were armed soldiers around waiting for me. As I looked around, I saw Aria on a horse looking at me. Those were definitely eyes full of hatred. Maybe because it was a dream, I was being chased around as if I was a traitor."

Bearing a grudge I had slept with someone I was being chased around... but the worst was yet to come.

“Gracia was there too. So I ran to get away only to find Ludmilla in my path.”

Ludmilla elegantly sipped some tea.

“So I got the drop on you. Looks like my dream self’s quite competent.”

“You were in a bed and sleepwear for some reason, so I ran in a different direction.”

As Ludmilla froze, Gracia and Elza pointed at her and laughed.

“Bringing a bed outside, how competent... pff!”

“Yeah, how competent. We’d never be able to think up such a plan.”

Ludmilla looked at the two of them,

‘You know it’s a dream,’ she said in a threatening voice, so I continued on with the dream.

“When I finally got away and hid myself I found May.”

May ate her meat and continued munching on it.

“Eva was on her back, and she was poised with a bow. Ah, these guys are enemies too, I thought and ran when an arrow came flying from behind.”

Eva and May wiped their mouths.

“Archery on horseback… it’s a bit difficult. Though I won’t say I can’t do it.”

“I try to run without shaking to an

extent. But I wouldn't chase Lyle around for something like that."

I know. These two understood they were low on the order of precedence.

"I knew the skies would be dangerous so I fled into a cave. When I did, I found Clara reading a book in a dark room. I've already sealed off all the exits, she said. And when she did, Vera came walking down the path I came with a smile."

Vera sighed.

"What, so you're saying I cooperated with Clara to corner you? No, that's a bit pushing it..."

Hoping she'd declare she wouldn't do it, Clara looked around at

everyone's eyes in confusion.

"Wait a second. He's talking about a dream you know."

But Ludmilla touched a hand to her chin.

"The dark horse... no, it's possible."

I continued on.

"So I grew scared and somehow got away. In the end, I didn't know who I was sleeping next to, but I just kept getting chased, and when I woke up I was covered in sweat. Shannon came up and told me to wake up. Well, that was probably because she had come to wake me up and was calling out in reality. But I was so surprised I cried out."

Shannon looked at me.

“So that’s why you let out a scream so early in the morning? How idiotic.”

In regards to Shannon’s smile, there an individual blatantly dropping her shoulders. It was Monica.

“F-for me not to appear in the Chicken Dickwad’s dream…”

To her, Damien’s automatons No. One Two and Three touched their mouths and laughed.

“I was being seriously chased around, and everyone’s face looked scary you know. Hah, in the end, who was it… rather, a dream of being chased around by allies is definitely a nightmare. I think I’ll

give up on today."

There, having heard the story, General Blois rubbed his chin.

"Doesn't that mean it was Novem-dono? No, I mean the one sleeping next to you. By process of elimination."

Monica looked at General Blois.

"So you've casually taken me out of the running? The only one who can shun me is the Chicken Dickhead. I don't get excited at all if another treats me coldly."

As I thought, it really was best to ignore her.

Everyone's eyes gathered on Novem. But Novem was a little

dazed out.

“Eh? … U-um, is something the matter?”

She stiffened in the middle of lifting her toast. There, Baldoir cleared his throats, and transferred everyone’s gaze.

“It would be troublesome if you avoided giving an address just because you had a bad dream. Today’s the day you invade Centralle, for Pete’s sakes.”

Right, the allied army had gathered around Centralle. Before the city that showed not the slightest reaction, I was to give the final address.

“Eh~? Let’s make it a different day.

It's a bad sign, I'm telling you."

On my lack of motivation, Baldoir's eyebrows were twitching.

"Not happening. We already have all the preparations together."

Well, I didn't seriously intent to stop it. It was just a breakfast conversation. I was quite tense myself, so I wanted to let myself loose a bit.

But at the very least, I could understand Novem was brooding over it even more than I had anticipated.

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Once upon a time, my ancestor... the previous Lyle had attacked Centralle.

It was to eliminate the beautiful vixen, the source of the decline overcoming the country.

To speak to results, he succeeded in defeating Agrissa.

But the Bahnseim House... feudal nobles at the time, made off with all the glory. Pushing him off the stage of history, it turned out that the Bahnseim House saved the continent, founding the Kingdom of Bahnseim.

Perhaps out of desperation, it seems he had erased the records quite

thoroughly.

From the start, my ancestor focused on nothing but Agrissa's defeat, and didn't advertise himself much to the public.

At the time, he had a woman he was dating, or perhaps married to, and already had a child with her. The Forxuz House's Novem of the time's attempt to take down whatever Bahnseim built up was a story lost to the ages. The woman wished for peace, and Centralle entered the protection of the Bahnseim Monarchy.

Perhaps that wasn't wrong.

"Well, based on how she went about it, she could have destroyed

Bahnseim."

On the side of the moving fortress' stage, I muttered such a thing as I gripped the Jewel in my hand. To my side stood Novem.

"... She had given up on fighting. Rather than thinking of all the pain her husband suffered through it all, she had prioritized herself."

I think that was taking it too far.

"If you had a child in your stomach, wouldn't you want to protect it?"

The one who responded to Novem in a fed-up tone was Aria. Holding her spear over her shoulder, she was waiting for the time to come.

Perhaps Novem understood that as

she didn't linger.

"Because of that, the Bahnseim Kingdom was formed, and the continent divided. After that, they had a number of wise lords, but the Walt House was tormented by the Bahnseim House time and again. It wasn't only the Walt House either."

It seems the First was the grandson of the ancestor who defeated Agrissa.

Our Founder, Basil Walt went independent with his first love as the trigger, and since he became a feudal lord, close to two hundred and fifty years had flowed by.

Perhaps the preparations were in order, as Clara came over to me.

And in the back, Eva prepared to use her Skill.

“Lyle-san, we’re ready. Eva is prepared to activate her Skill. What shall we do about the music?”

I thought a bit.

“Well, let’s play safe and do a dignified piece, with a movement to fire them up at the end, perhaps? Rather, Eva’s Skill sure is convenient. It lets your voice reach people, and it can even make music at will.”

There, Eva popped her face out.

“It’s convenient. But personally, I think live performances are best. And I don’t really like it if my voice is only reaching through Skill. So

don't make me use it too much, okay?"

She waved her hands as she returned to her post. I gripped the Jewel.

Miranda and Aria nearby called over to me.

"Now get out there."

"Cinch it firmly. You're the supreme commander after all."

I smiled at the two of them. Clara went off to move the mechanisms. And once the stage started to rise, Novem looked at me and lowered her head.

"Lyle-sama, I'm sure you have much to think about, but this Novem

Forxuz... shall accompany you to the end."

I nodded.

"I do hope that end is the same end I'm thinking of. I'll be off."

Before the stage reached its peak, I could hear Eva's music start up through her Skill. It felt as if their was an orchestra playing nearby.

And I took a deep breath.

Slowly, the stage rose, and positioned me so I could look over everyone. When it stopped I could feel the eyes gathering.

It was time for the Third's Skill 【Dream】. I could see Centralle's ramparts before my very eyes, and

the allied armies that surrounded them.

Right above me, I made an illusion of myself so everyone could see. I matched its movements to mine, making it reproduce whatever I did.

My voice would reach, and my form was visible. With this, I'm sure it would have a slight effect. As I heard the clamor I opened my mouth.

"Heroes and heroines who've gathered here today, lend me your ears."

Calling the knights and soldiers heroes, I praised them. They were heroes without a doubt. Standing against the heinous acts of Celes,

they were to save the continent.

And among them, just how many would return alive...

“I’m sure there are many among you who’ve lent ear to the atrocities the Bahnseim House has committed. Perhaps some among you have quivered under their brutality. But against it all, you stand! You are all without a doubt, heroes... and men of valor! In this battle of historic proportions, you shall definitely carve your names into history’s slate!”

It’s not like that wasn’t going to happen, but at least the fact they participated in this battle would remain.

A song of dignified majesty was playing, and that atmosphere came out in my words as well.

“If we do not win this battle, then dark clouds loom over the future of the continent. And in truth, many sorrowful events have transpired. In Beim, a large number of casualties have come out from the army dispatched by Bahnseim. The inside of this country is the same. I’m sure you’ve all seen it on the way here.”

The towns and villages without vigor, and the lords and soldiers of doubtful character. Even when released and their sanity regained, they would turn back on all they had done, filled with a sense of guilt and regret.

“Eventually this hell shall spread through Bahnseim to the continent as a whole. If we don’t prevent it now, the lands shall be stained in fear and death! Here, now is the time to fight. Now is the time to decide our future!”

To many of those taking part, it they could call themselves justice, it made it easier to fight. If they thought they were doing something wrong, they couldn’t help but give way to hesitation.

When it came to life or death, doubt would be born.

Especially when many of them were foreign soldiers without any relation to Bahnseim at all. Justice... if they didn’t have a reason, they

would never get serious with this battle.

There was meaning to what they were doing. I had to teach them that. Even if that was for my own sake.

“Ladies and gentlemen, in this large battle, I require your power. To defeat the fiendish line of Bahnseim, and exemplify righteousness to the continent!”

Using shills planted from the start and thought transference, the cheers began to spread.

Ah, so this is how I’m going to send so many men to their deaths. And as I thought over how many would die, I lifted up my fist.

But someone had to do it. And I couldn't sit and wait around for the one who would.

If they were there, I'd obediently lend them my power, and perhaps plow a field or something in some remote land post-war. Just how many times easier would that be?

If I stayed silent, the people gathered here wouldn't be in danger. But eventually Celes would move, and perhaps they would fall dead without resistance or meaning.

While the surrounding countries still had power, I had to stop Celes at all costs.

I didn't think I was right. Whatever

I was doing was exactly the same as her.

Looking at someone like me, what would the ancestors think? Once more I'd been told to flee to some land beyond Celes' hands.

But even so, I was the one who chose to tread this bloodstained path. If I mulled over it, perhaps they would yell at me.

Milleia-san had said it.

To sit on a throne made over a mountain of corpses. And to grasp the future.

"Heroes, grasp the future in your hands!"

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